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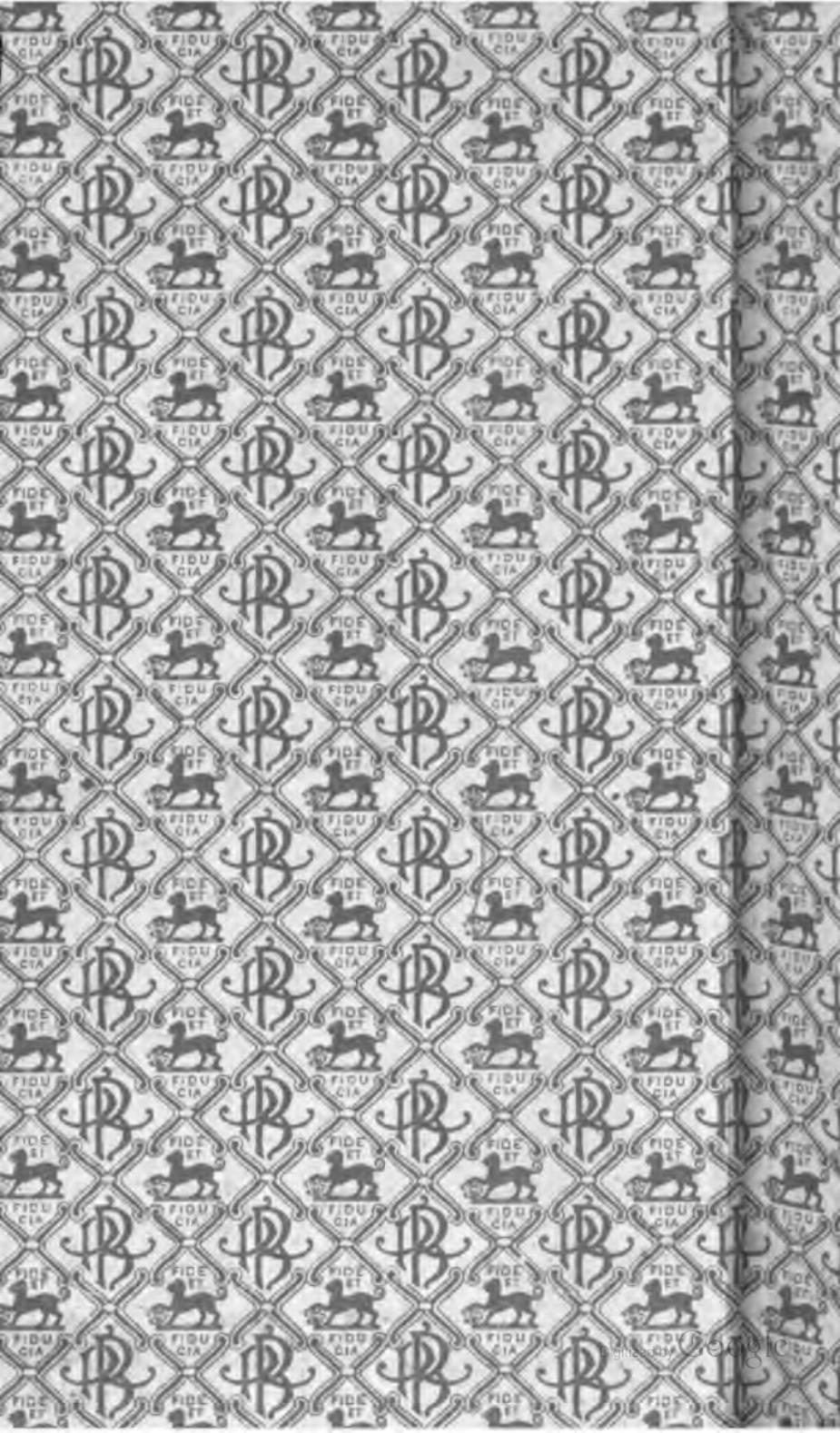
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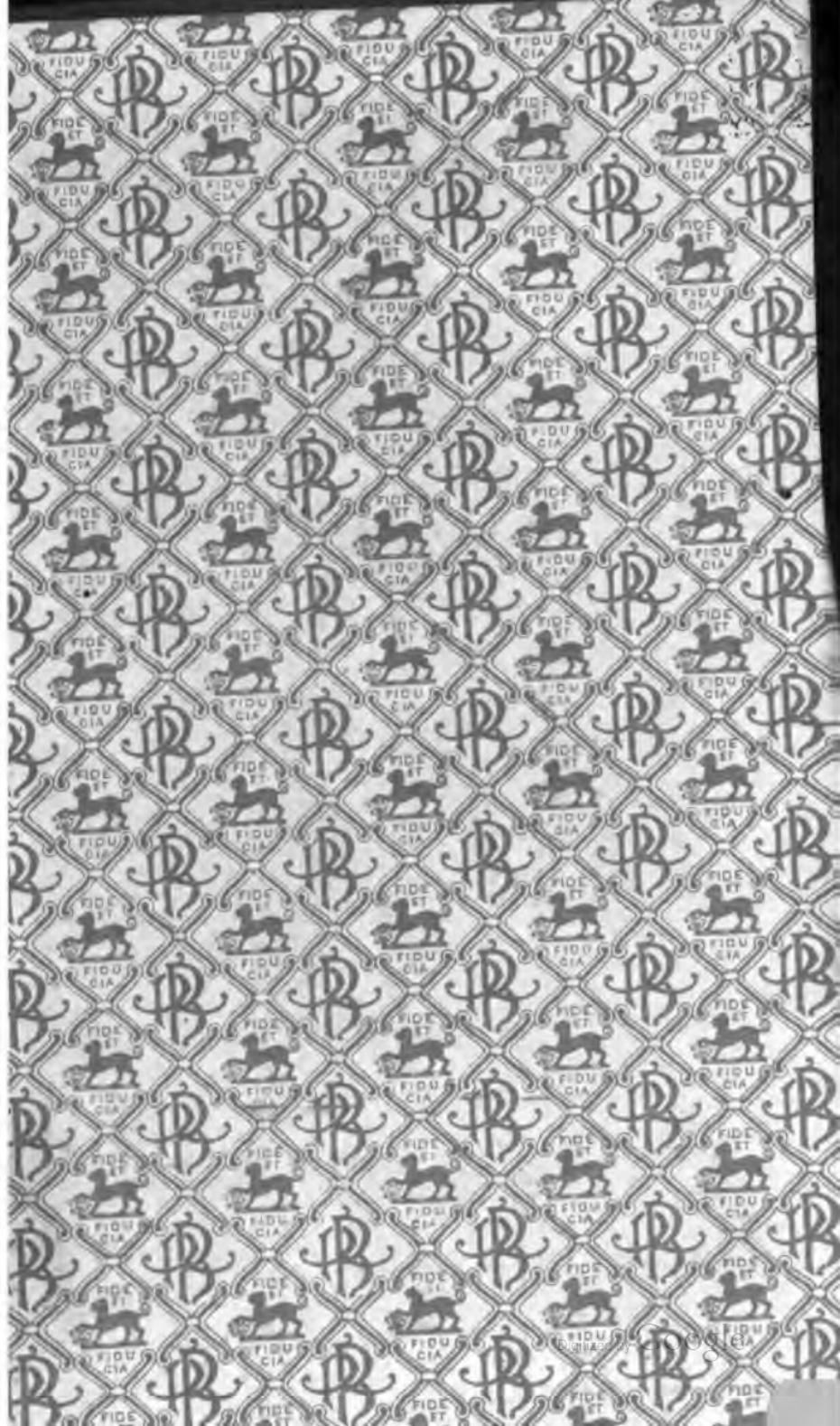
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THE MAID OF HONOUR

VOL. II.

THE MAID OF HONOUR

A Tale of the Dark Days of France

BY

THE HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD

AUTHOR OF

"LADY GRIZEL," "THE LORDS OF STROGUE," "ABIGEL ROWE"

ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen

1891

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TO

WILLIAM HENRY WELDON.

**A TRIBUTE
OF OLD FRIENDSHIP.**

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XI.

	PAGE
A CRISIS	I

CHAPTER XII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND	25
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIII.

DOMESTIC SURGERY	68
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIV.

CHECK	112
-----------------	-----

CHAPTER XV.

THE SITUATION CHANGES	137
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVI.		PAGE
THE ABBÉ IS TERRIBLY PERPLEXED		162
CHAPTER XVII.		
GABRIELLE HAS AN IDEA		208
CHAPTER XVIII.		
A SURPRISE		245
CHAPTER XIX.		
A COUNCIL OF WAR		273



THE MAID OF HONOUR.

CHAPTER XI.

A CRISIS.

THE abbé's departure left a void in the household. He had grown to be so conspicuous and necessary a feature in it that even Gabrielle regretted his mercurial presence, while conscious of a feeling of relief in that he no more pursued her. It was but a temporary respite, she knew. He would return ere long, renew the siege, demand an answer. What that answer was to be, she did not feel certain.

Her interest in herself had gone. She missed the readings, the soft declamation of the musical voice ; for, left more alone than ever, her mind brooded without distraction on the past and the tangled possibilities of the future. The chevalier's attentions were rather irksome than otherwise, for his conversational powers were limited. His position was that of watch-dog, and, as all the world knows, watch-dogs are expected to watch and not to talk. He was content to sit staring with vacant eyes at his sister-in-law for an unlimited period, breathing very hard and emitting strong fumes of spirits with a meaningless but complacent expression of conscious rectitude. He was doing his duty, and knew it. Since his rebuff on that moonlight night, now long ago, he had seemed in his slow way to have

become possessed by a fixed idea. The prize was not for him. His brother had behaved magnanimously in permitting him to try first for it. Having failed—as he might have known he would—he must keep his promise, and assist him in the chase to the best of his abilities.

He was a remarkable man, his brother, of that he had been convinced for years, who was destined to have his will in all things ; and quite right, too, for commanding genius should surely achieve success.

Dreary fat Phebus ! Lulled by the monotonous life at Lorge, the little intellect he possessed had gone to sleep. Now and again he had sallied forth to shoot with the gamekeeper, but could never hit it off with him. His oracular remarks were met by silence. Jean Boulot

treated him with a sullen and enforced politeness, and it dawned on his sluggish mind by slow degrees that the gamekeeper heartily despised him. He despised by a common country peasant, who, instead of sneering, should have been grateful to be noticed by a half-brother of the Marquis de Gange! The position was so unsatisfactory that the chevalier gave up the chase. He also gave up riding, for his horse would take the direction of Montbazon, the welcome of whose inmates frightened him. Angelique looked so wistful, and the old lady was so effusively hospitable that he quite trembled in his shoes lest he should wake up some morning and find that he was married.

Moping about with no occupation either for mind or body, it was natural that he should have fallen into the trap which

is prepared for the idle and empty-pated ; that he should while away the laggard hours in the company of the best cognac.

Time hung very heavy on the hands of neglected Gabrielle. Toinon was a sweet girl who strove by many little acts to comfort her stricken heart ; but the pride of the chatelaine stood between herself and Toinon. It was bitter to expose her wrongs to the tender touch of a loving foster-sister. Even when engaged on missions to the sick poor, of whom, alack, there were far too many, she could not keep her mind from brooding. "What was, and what might have been," formed a dismal refrain that was for ever ringing in her ears.

The abbé remained a long time absent. His letters were full of interest, though

not particularly cheerful. He appeared to have come to the conclusion that affairs in the capital were not improving. "The king is much to blame," he wrote, "while the queen is rash, and the combination is not fortuitous." He told of the strange and aggressive proceedings of that impudent body, the National Assembly, of the treasonous language employed by some of its members. These impertinent rascals babbled of the Rights of Man in a manner which, to one of superior birth, was disgusting. He related that their majesties had been forcibly taken from Versailles and bidden to dwell in the metropolis, and told stories of Monsieur de Lafayette, whose conduct was the more to be regretted in that he was himself a noble. He had actually proclaimed in a public séance of the rabble who directed affairs,

that, "When oppression renders a revolution necessary, insurrection is the most sacred of duties." Good heavens! what next? Political societies had thrown off the mantle of secrecy and openly paraded their abominable sentiments. The "Society of the Jacobins" bade fair to be a dangerous element in the future, although a rival club called the Feuillans had recently been established to counter-balance its baleful influence. Altogether, Pharamond, who was usually so lively, looked at events through darkened spectacles.

The abbé had duly presented his credentials to the Maréchal de Brèze, who had been effusively civil and had wearied him with endless questions about his daughter's happiness. The life at Lorge must be Arcadian, he had declared with

satisfaction, or the lovely chatelaine would have returned to the capital long since.

Why, suggested the abbé, did he not make a pilgrimage to visit her ?

No, he had replied, shaking his venerable head ; happiness was a fragile thing that must not be disturbed. The advent of an old man and an old woman would be like the throwing of a stone into a tarn. He was content to know that Gabrielle was happy, and to write and receive letters. Moreover, he did not wish his darling to return to Paris in its present chaotic state.

These letters of Pharamond's were mumbled out at breakfast by the chevalier.

Clovis had resumed his habit of breakfasting alone—moreover, politics bored him ; but mademoiselle made a point of being present, after having given her dear

charges their own meal in the distant wing; for she liked to hear the news indited by the abbé.

Gabrielle seldom spoke. She seemed in a despondent daze which provoked the observant governess. Was the silly creature going out of her mind? Those who are unable to stand up for themselves deserve to be subjected to the yoke. Aglaé's fingers itched to slap the marquise, or give her a sound shaking. But she had been lectured by the abbé before he left, was aware that the dog was watching, and knew that it behoved her to be prudent; not to quarrel with her ally at present. As to Gabrielle, she smiled sometimes a mysterious smile that was more sad than tears. Happy! why, her heart was slowly breaking. Nobody wanted her. Her only desire was to

remain secluded—shielded by distance from the searching glances of her father, who, with the eyes of love, could not fail to read her misery.

Autumn waned, the winter came and went, and spring came round, and still the abbé was absent. The long evenings, when, try as she would to exorcise them, the procession of her sorrows danced fandangoes in the brain of Gabrielle to the accompaniment of the chevalier's snoring, were becoming unendurable. How long was this martyrdom to continue?—how long?

The cold winds had softened their rigour; the air was growing balmy. There were voices down below in half-whispered converse. Moving to the open window, Gabrielle looked out. How calm and sweet an evening! How placidly

the river flowed past the feet of the gloomy castle! How gently the boughs waved opposite beyond the stream to the rhythm of the breeze!

Under the windows of the grand saloon there was a sort of narrow gang-way which acted as penthouse to the grilled windows of the dungeons on the water's edge. In old times it had been used as a platform for embarkation in boats, but now it was trodden by few feet, for its flags were slimy and treacherous. The voices were those of Jean and Toinon, who were apparently indulging in a delightful flirtation. They had been out rowing. The clumsy wherry used by the family was moored to a ring a few yards distant. The lovers were exchanging delicious confidences before parting for the night.

Lovers billing and cooing in the moonlight, discoursing, doubtless, on the happiness they should certainly enjoy when married. They believed in human happiness, and looked forward to a future ! Gabrielle laughed a hoarse laugh that frightened her, and she retreated to the boudoir in a feverish tingle. What was there to-night that made her feel more desolate than usual ? She must be unwell, for her nerves were twanging so that she could not sit still a moment. The children were asleep by this time, for mademoiselle was very careful of them. She deserved, at least, that justice. Asleep and dreaming—not of her ; for she rarely saw them now at all, except gambolling like kids in the distance. She felt suddenly impelled to be near the treasures over whom her soul yearned so sorely. She could not see

them, of course, for had not mademoiselle made her understand long since that in the nursery she held no authority? The dear ones. Thank God they were happy! She would creep out in the spring air and kiss the wall behind which the children lay! Almost guiltily she took up a silken wrap with trembling fingers and stole forth. It was well the chevalier was in a boozy sleep, or he would insist on following, and in his presence she would have been ashamed to gratify her whim. Away, across the inner yard, through the postern door, of which she wore a golden key upon a bracelet, along the trim alleys of the moat garden to the extreme right wing of the two floors of which mademoiselle had taken possession. As we know, she established herself on arrival in the rooms below the salon; but later,

under pretext that it was damp, had removed herself and her charges. In the chamber now used as nursery she had caused a window to be pierced, so as to give access to the garden moat. It was so much better for the children, she had pleaded, to be able to dance out at once upon the sunlit grass instead of threading darksome corridors. How thoughtful! Of course she was right, as usual. Clovis was enchanted with her attention to details, and the window was made forthwith.

A ray of light streamed across the sward. Strange. The casement was open. How imprudent, and the dear ones in bed! In hot and anxious wrath Gabrielle was about to rush forward and remonstrate, when her steps were stayed. They were not in bed, for she could detect their

voices prattling with the marquis and their governess. Stealing stealthily nearer she peeped in. Through her breast there shot a pain so sharp that she almost hoped to die. An affecting family group, of which *she* should have been the centre—her legitimate place usurped by that wicked cruel woman! while she, the mistress of the house, was shivering without in the night air! A pariah—a leper—a loathsome thing—cast without the gates. What had she done—what had she done—to deserve this dreadful fate? The marquis was reclining in a low chair, with the complacent calm that comfort brings, while Aglaé, bending over, was carefully bandaging his hand. With what tenderness she folded and tightened the linen. He had injured himself in some slight way with a broken bottle, and was smilingly watching her

work whilst hearkening to the babble of the little ones who, in wadded dressing-gowns, were toasting their pink toes before the fire.

“ You are so good to all of us,” softly remarked Clovis. “ Camille and Victor, say, do you appreciate mademoiselle ? ”

“ I try to be a mother to them,” was her calm response.

A mother ! Clovis sighed and frowned, while the children cried out with blithe accord, “ Aglaé ? of course we love her.”

Camille, stealing up behind, passed her tiny arms about the portly waist, while Aglaé said, quietly, “ Be still, my pet, or you will make me hurt your father.”

Victor—a wise boy—wagged his head sagely at the hissing hearth, and announced his conviction, “ That mademoiselle had come down from heaven. But, never

mind," he added, "when she gets back she'll have a higher place than before, on such a nice and pearly cloud."

"How's that?" asked the marquis, amused.

"You'll have a nice place, too," continued the urchin. "Every evening when I say my prayers, I ask heaven to be good to papa and mademoiselle."

The marquise staggered away with fingers tight clasped over dry and burning eyes. "They are complete without me," she moaned, panting like a hunted animal. "There is no place for me! no place in all the world!"

She tottered along the surrounding belt of green like one struck blind, till she came to the end where the moat was closed against the river.

"No place for me! no place for me!"

Gabrielle muttered, with teeth that chattered as do those of one in an ague fit. Swaying to and fro she looked into the water and discerned the black bulk of the wherry. A luminous idea shot across her mind. If the boat were found drifting down the stream with naught but a silken wrap in it, they would drag the Loire for the missing chatelaine, and, at least, pretend to be sorry for the accident. Yes! an accident—that was the solution of the difficulty. Her father would deplore her death, but would never know that she had brought it about herself. Why had this never occurred to her before? The maréchal would grieve, but would get over it; for the grief of the old is short-lived, and are not the dead at rest? Happy dead to sleep so sound. She soon would be one of the shadowy phalanx—at rest for evermore.

Taking a hasty survey of the scene she stepped into the boat and loosed the chain. There was none to look on her, save the blank eyes of the dark chateau. In its history what was a life—an intolerably weary life? Was not its memory green concerning the water-dungeon and the torture-chamber?

“For me there is no place in all the world,” repeated the chattering jaws as the boat shot into mid-stream. As it chanced there were four human eyes watching that she wist not of.

Jean and Toinon were not gone, though they had retreated into shadow. At sound of the loosening chain the latter had shuddered and hidden her face on the ample breast close by.

“Dungeon ghosts — rattling their

gyves," Jean observed, quietly. " See—there's another yonder."

Toinon looked up and held her breath. In the broad moonbeams a woman stood erect in a boat! A woman, who slowly divested herself of a drapery and arranged it carefully upon the seat. Then she placed a foot upon the gunwale and deliberately plunged into the stream.

It was all so unexpected—so sudden—that the two stood paralysed. Both knew the slim figure well. They were startled from awe-stricken stupor by shouts above. The chevalier was stamping on a balcony wildly waving his arms. "It is Gabrielle! Gabrielle!" he shrieked. "Save her! save her! save her!" And then, with a despairing yell, he dashed away in the direction of the children's wing.

Jean muttered with contempt: "The

useless imbecile," and, disengaging himself from Toinon's encircling arms, leapt from the platform into the water. Breathless and proud of him, Toinon watched his strong strokes as they clove the oily surface. He had hold of her—thank God! and was bearing his burthen to the bank.

There was a hubbub and an outcry in the house approaching nearer. Clovis and the chevalier appeared at a window shouting madly: "Save her!" The marquis disappeared from the balcony, and touching a spring, vanished down a secret staircase which gave upon the slippery gangway, accompanied by Mademoiselle Brunelle, who with a new care upon her brow was swiftly following his lead. De Gange received the inanimate burthen into his arms, while tears poured down his face. "God bless you, Jean," he sobbed, "God

bless you. I will never forget this deed. She will live—she has but swooned. Jean, you have saved her from death—me from a life-long remorse."

Aglaé's clouded visage grew more perplexed as he took roughly from her the mantle she had cast over her shoulders to wrap it round his dripping burthen.

"He takes my cloak," she muttered, "not caring if I feel cold!"

"Aglaé, feel," he whispered anxiously. "Am I not right? Does not her pulse still beat?"

Mademoiselle Brunelle roused herself from astonished reverie to attend to the exigencies of the moment. "Yes," she declared, with authoritative promptitude. "The poor crazy lady lives. Toinon, warm a bed without delay. Jean, take

horse at once and fetch a doctor. We two will see to her meanwhile."

Moaning and shaking, the scared and palsied chevalier stood helpless by, wringing his hands together. "She went in the boat alone, poor thing," he whimpered, "because she could not trust me. Oh! that fatal night—that fatal night! Of course she would not trust me."

Meanwhile, the marquis and his affinity bore their burthen up the winding stair. Neither spoke till they reached the saloon and laid the unconscious marquise upon a couch. Then Aglaé, more perplexed than ever, sighed.

"Thank God, she's saved; thank God!" Clovis murmured, fervently.

"Who would have ever thought," reflected the governess aloud, "that so long-suffering and useless piece of

goods could be goaded to take her life?"

"Hush!" shuddered the marquis. "Ever after I should have deemed myself her murderer!"

"A thousand pities," mused made-moiselle. "If he had only let her drown, at this moment you would be free."

Clovis looked up in horror, blanched to the pallor of a statue.





CHAPTER XII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

WITH a turn of the kaleidoscope is another pattern formed. Lying in the great state bed with its ponderous carven canopy and heavy curtains of deep blue velvet fringed with gold, Gabrielle wondered whether she had awakened in a kinder world or whether she was dreaming in the old rugose one. No. It was the same gorgeously gloomy chamber in which she had so often wept, with its dim ancestors frowning from the background of mouldering arras.

(25)

Yonder, by the tall emblazoned mantel, was the familiar ebony cabinet in which a long bygone De Brèze, who was an alchemist, had been wont to lock his phials. To the left, was the mullioned window, with wide sill, looking out upon the paved courtyard. On the sill was a row of ponderous bronze pots of the Renaissance period, filled with gay plants to hide out the blank wall opposite. Both Madame de Vaux and Angelique had always shuddered when they crossed the threshold of this room, vowing that the big bed, like a funereal catafalque, was a fit resting-place for spectres, not for human beauty. When counselled to move elsewhere, or do up the apartment in more cheerful fashion, the chatelaine had smilingly shaken her head. The ladies of the castle had always occupied this room, and she would follow

their precedent, not being afraid of ghosts.

“The precedents of Lorge were pretty ones to follow,” retorted her neighbour. “Many of the chatelaines were murdered, poor things! and the rest so wretched that murder, however atrocious, would have been hailed as a release.”

Alas! The destiny of the present one was no brighter than that of the others. She had been miserable enough in this tranquil chamber, and had oftentimes prayed for death. But now, somehow, Fortune seemed to be weary of persecution. Was it possible that out of the sinister tangle content might yet be unwound?

There were voices whispering in the antechamber which Gabrielle recognized as those of Jean and Toinon, watchers. Now and again, Toinon would gently open

the door and reconnoitre, and seeing the invalid apparently asleep would quietly close it again, but not before the sick lady had caught a glimpse of the chevalier behind, still wearing an expression of dismay.

Wonder of wonders ! Sometimes when she woke from fitful dozing, she would see the figure of the marquis standing at the bed-foot anxiously peering down at her. He looked haggard and careworn. Could it be on her account ? Hidden away somewhere in a remote recess could there be a flame of affectionate esteem for her still flickering ?

Simulating slumber, she would scan him narrowly. He was evidently unhappy, had something on his mind, was unpleasantly preoccupied. Her heart leapt with the thought that it was on her

account, perhaps, that he was troubled. He certainly was thinking a good deal about her, for though he did not stop long he often visited the chamber. Although well-nigh beyond belief, Gabrielle could hardly doubt that he was unhappy for her sake. His eyes had been opened! It had come home to him how cruel his neglect had been, and he was sorry. It needed but a kind word of encouragement from her to bring about a tardy reconciliation.

Choosing an opportunity, she gently put forth her hand and clasped that of Clovis with a tender pressure, murmuring the while, "Husband! I was driven to do that wicked thing by a mistake. God will forgive. Can you, too, pardon?"

At sound of her feeble voice, the marquis started guiltily and hung his head;

and as he remained silent, his hand inert in hers, she proceeded slowly—

“ It is not you who are to blame, dear. Occupied as your mind is, you are unable to conceive what to a loving woman are isolation and indifference. I teased and annoyed you with my jealousy ; but then, as a girl, I was so pampered—steeped to the lips in love ! Give me confidence and perfect trust and you shall be vexed no more. Obedient in all things, assuming no right to counsel or rebuke, I will be your faithful life-companion, the half of your very self ! ”

Much more did she say in the same strain, without reproach, pleading for a modest place within his heart.

Ah me ! What a mockery are these earthly unions for better or worse till death do us part ! The best are doomed to

fling away their wealth of tenderness upon recipients who do not crave for it. Is it a punishment meted in subtle irony for the transgressions of a previous life? For half a lifetime we persist in lavishing our love upon a phantom, and, discovering by chance how evil is the wraith, lie down despairing. A fool's paradise would be a charming residence, were we not pretty certain, sooner or later, to be expelled from it with violence. On this tiny dust grain of the universe—let us hope it is not so in the more important worlds, wherein we hope to sojourn later—we batter our pates at a tender age against the stone wall of disillusion, become early familiar with broken promises. Fortunately, the sustaining angel Hope has more lives than a cat. Pummelled, stoned, and mangled beyond recognition, behold she

sits up and rubs herself, charming well again.

What the hapless Gabrielle took for the stir of dormant affection was no more than an ignoble mixture of shame, remorse, and anxiety. The conscience of Clovis had dinned into him long since that he was behaving very ill ; that he had espoused a beautiful woman with a fresh and ardent temperament and a well-lined purse ; that, thanks to the last, he lived in gilded ease, and gave to its owner in exchange nothing for which she yearned. People are vastly provoking, who clamorously demand that we have not to bestow. How wearisome are those who go on repeating, "I want your love and nothing else," when they ought to know that we have no love to give. Then is sure to follow the phase of reproaches and tears which is more

tiresome still. Clovis, when conscience pricked, was very sorry for his helpmeet ; and sorry for himself, too, that she should be so worrying. From his point of view, he was justified in withdrawing from the dining-hall the light of his comely countenance. How can a man have any appetite with so rueful a visage opposite ? Talk of skeletons at feasts ! Here was one at every meal, because speechless no less eloquent. That which is unpleasant and can't be helped, it behoves us in self-defence to put away and forget as quickly as possible. Clovis had (metaphorically) plunged into the magic tub with Aglaé in order to forget his skeleton. He knew he was doing wrong, but was equally aware that it was not in him to do right. Why could not Gabrielle be sensible ? If people would only cultivate that humble

virtue common sense, how much more smoothly life's wheels would run. Why could not she, realizing—perhaps with pain—that Luna is not in the market as a purchaseable article, sit quietly down with philosophy, and give up crying for the moon?

When the poor lady was impelled to shuffle off her coil, the completeness of the desolation revealed due to her husband's fault, came home to him with a mighty twinge ; and he felt angry with her in that she should be capable of inflicting so severe a nip. The estrangement was not his fault, he argued with conscience. It was his misfortune and hers, which it was in the province of neither to remedy. Of course, it was all a pity ; but are there not numberless things in this life that are “a pity,” but which we are power-

less to alter? The brief period of *tête-à-tête* when they first came to live at Lorge had been ghastly dull, and he, like a sensible man, had sought refuge from it in his books. Then merciful Providence had sent a set of people to make his situation more bearable—his and hers also. Why could she not let herself drift in calm content, as he had done? It always came back to that, and every time he was the more convinced of it. His wife was an unreasonable creature, who persisted in pining for what she could not get instead of making the best of what she had. Perhaps he had not behaved quite nicely in the matter of the prodigies. Yet after all, was it not essential that they should receive trained instruction, and had they not of their own accord turned from their mother to the governess? He had never

said, "My dears, you must care no longer for mamma, and adore your governess." Was it not evident that mamma wearied them as much as she did him, while their instructress was the most delightful comrade that ever breathed, as well as abnormally clever?

With this course of argument conscience was convinced, or pretended to be, and curled itself up and slept, and would have continued thus in charmed repose, but for this new disturbance. There can be no denying that there must be something radically wrong, when a woman who used to be serene leaps with felonious intent out of a wherry. Though everyone was told that the affair was an accident, nobody believed it. The marquis was ashamed and dreaded a scandal.

Of course, when the story reached

them, the Montbazon party came trundling over in the shanderydan, with goggling eyes and ears acock, to inquire into the extraordinary tale. Clovis received them with scant courtesy, but the old baroness was not to be put off with a cold shoulder, and Angelique took little trouble to cloak her suspicions. What could madame have been doing—navigating the Loire in the middle of the night, and tumbling overboard? Why choose so strange an hour for a solitary excursion, and why fall out of so clumsy and broad-beamed a craft? Could the dear marquis explain? The dear marquis became testy, and, shrugging his shoulders, advised the ladies to visit madame who was in bed, but well enough to tell them all about it. The ladies sat on either side of the great catafalque, under shadow of the blue

velvet curtains, and sniffed at one another with meaning across the counterpane. Cross-questioned by the baron as they drove home, the baroness pursed her lips in ominous silence, while Angelique remarked, "If with those sad eyes welling with tears, she persists that she is happy, and vows that on that night her foot slipped, in courtesy we must pretend to believe her." To which the baron pertinently replied, "Foot slipped, indeed! and in the middle of the river, too. What was it doing on the gunwale?"

Clovis knew that the de Vaux family would spread damaging reports, but he had yet another cause for anxiety. A certain remark had been dropped by Mademoiselle Brunelle as the two were carrying their burthen to the salon, which was like a douche of icy water. "If he

had let her drown, you would be free!" What an atrociously cold-blooded sentiment from the lips of the good-natured Aglaé! As to this the marquis's conscience had no suggestion to make, for it had never entered his head to desire his wife's demise.

It is another unpleasing fact with regard to our little earth, that nothing can remain stationary. We must always be on the move—backward if not forward. Clovis, pleased with the situation as it had chosen to develop itself, wished for naught but the continuance of the *status quo*; and now it came rudely home to him that mademoiselle, instead of being satisfied, as he was, had been raising shadowy edifices in cloudland. The glance which accompanied her regretful words had been full of significance. She could look so far

forward as to welcome the departure of Gabrielle in order that she might occupy her place. And a governess too—without a shred of a pedigree—who had never heard the name of her grandfather! That a person of low birth, however admirable, should presume to aspire to the coronet of a Marquise de Gange took the breath away! The idea was as wildly fantastic as it was revolting. And yet she had so wormed herself into his life that he knew he could not tear her thence without an awful struggle. If that poor thing had died, could he in course of time have been persuaded to take the governess? Who might prophesy? Most fortunately there was no question of such a possibility, as the lady had been saved and was recovering. Mademoiselle must be his affinity—nor hope for anything more lofty. And

yet the more he thought of it, all the more shocked did Clovis feel at the absurdity of such aspirations in one so lowly, and the cold-bloodedness of that remark.

For her part the unlucky speech had been wrung from Aglaé by genuine surprise, for the boating catastrophe had opened to her mind's eye a dazzling vista of actual possibilities as new as they were astonishing. It had certainly occurred to her before that it would be nice some day to be Marquise de Gange, but it had not struck her that the present marquise could be induced to open the door herself to her successor. It was merely in a spirit of casual spite that Aglaé had insolently invited Gabrielle, during their last interview, to retire out of the world.

How surprising are the vagaries of the human animal! No one would have

guessed that a quiet reserved woman, who was so feeble as to suppose she could buy the enemy with a bracelet, could be driven to take her life! The discovery suggested for the future a new series of tactics. Owing to vexatious interference the tragedy had miscarried this time, but surely with deft management a similar condition of mind to that which had led up to it could be brought about again? And the second time precautions might be taken to ensure a different termination. There was no hurry about it. When matters of serious import are under consideration it is a woeful thing to hurry. The mawkish creature was in bed, being fondled and caressed. By and by when she grew better, a progressive series of cunningly-masked attacks would have to be organized which should finally and

completely rout the insignificant foe and leave her prone upon the field.

Meanwhile there was something new that rather puzzled the governess. Clovis was so thin-skinned that it was only by surpassing skill that he could be managed. He was so beset with crotchetts which required coaxing. There was some bee worrying in his bonnet now, for instead of frisking about the feet of his affinity, according to habit, he slunk away from her approach with uneasy bashfulness, and bestowed his attentions on the invalid.

With regard to the latter there was nothing to dread, for the blandishments of the wife invariably had the effect in the long run of alienating the husband. On this score the mind of the schemer was easy. But what if she were indeed to die in a not too distant future? Clovis had

shudderingly declared on the fateful night that had she been drowned he would have considered himself a murderer. What a stupid old adage it is which says the dead do not return! How many, when they have passed from sight, are more formidable than when alive! Would it be so with Gabrielle? Is not remorse a more formidable barrier than the imperial wall of China? As it was, mademoiselle could not deny that the marquis had taken to avoiding her, that in his eyes there was a sinister expression, in which fear and distrust were blended. He must have caught a glimpse under her ample skirt of a cloven hoof instead of a substantial foot, and have been alarmed by the spectacle. This alarm must be lulled to rest, or the influence of the affinity might stand in actual peril. It would be odd if in the

end he crawled out of her clutches—very odd.

Pooh! She was strong, and he was weak. Had she not proved already that she could bend him like a willow wand? And yet—in front there lay a mist which even sharp-sighted Aglaé was unable to penetrate. She laughed with quiet cynicism when she considered what Clovis's feelings would be if he could read the dark thoughts of his affinity. He had read too much already, and the effect had not been good. Now that she knew what she wanted, it behoved her to consider the attitude which the marquis must be made to assume, for his conduct, whatever it might be, would, of course, be influenced by another will than his own.

Gabrielle was to depart.

That much was settled in the mind

of the governess. With regard to the husband, two courses were open. Was he to be lulled into forgetting the untoward remark which had so shocked him, or was he to grow accustomed by degrees to its implied suggestion, and be induced tacitly to approve by skilful wheedling? Her bringing-up had led the governess to hold a low opinion of human nature. No one ever lived, she fully believed, so devoid of the leaven of wickedness as to be proof against temptation to crime. It was merely a matter of surroundings and the amount of temptation employed. But then in the case of Clovis, the inertness and hesitancy of his character called for consideration. Moreover, his recent behaviour had shown that he did not care as yet sufficiently warmly for his Aglaé to go all lengths with her.

Alarmed for his own safety, he would shrink and run off howling. It is wiser in dealing with some people to do a thing without consulting them, and obtain consent to the act when it is done—irrevocably and irremediably. Clearly, the first course was the most judicious. Clovis must be amused and petted till the temporary access of inconvenient remorse was past, the little speech forgotten—and wake up some fine day in the not too far distant future to find himself bereaved and a widower.

All this was mighty well in theory, but what of the plaguey abbé? He would hear of the water episode and be seriously annoyed. The governess was angered to think of the length of time which must elapse ere her scheme could be brought to a head—and all through the idiotic passion

of Pharamond for the marquise! It would be dangerous to make an open enemy of Pharamond, for were he so minded, he could place many spokes in her wheel; all the more easily at this precise juncture when Clovis was so shocked. As a matter of policy, whereby she might herself benefit, she was quite ready to push Gabrielle into his arms as quickly as possible, for she reckoned that he was a fickle man, who would soon tire of a toy attained, and so soon as he had done with it, would not care how soon it was broken. But then she was not without grave doubts of his ever succeeding in his suit. Mawkish, milk-and-water women, such as this pale-faced creature, have no passions worthy of the name, but exhale themselves in sighs and prayer.

And here was another awkward point.

Given that the abbé was rebuffed, compelled to abandon the siege of the marquise, would he not lose all motive for further assisting the governess? and that before she was prepared to do without him? Of course, he would then cease to sing her praises in the ears of Clovis; would even perhaps, to suit his own interests, endeavour to divide those whom he had assisted in uniting? If the abbé could only be got rid of! But there seemed, peer out into the horizon as she would, no chance of getting rid of him. No. He must be humoured — hoodwinked, if possible. The abbé for the present must be endured, treated as a trusty ally, since it would not do to attack him as an enemy. Mademoiselle guessed that the chevalier would report all that had happened, so concealment was out of

the question. When he received tidings of the episode he would, of course, come home, and in an evil mood. With a peevish sigh, she wrote an effusive letter to Pharamond, begging him to return to Lorge, wishing the while that he would break his neck upon the journey. In the letter she artfully stated that she had been guilty of a little error. When you wish to avert a scolding, it is well to be candid and confess ; and rather make the most of the peccadillo.

Thus she came vaguely to the conclusion that the alliance must stand good for the present, that she and the abbé must maintain their friendship, outwardly at least, and that, with regard to the fate of Gabrielle, she must wait and watch events. Perhaps destiny in a generous mood would point out some means of clearing the

thorn-strewn path by sweeping away the abbé. If he were got rid of, the course of Aglaé would be quite plain ; the shrift of the marquise would be a short one.

Pharamond received two letters by the same courier, and boiled with displeasure at the contents of both. With what a culpable stupidity had all of them been behaving in his absence ! That the chevalier—useless lump of carrion—should proclaim himself a fool was only to be expected. It had been the height of folly to trust to the discretion of a zany. By his own showing, Phebus had failed to watch properly over the marquise, and the malignant Aglaé had wreaked on her, with impunity, the full venom of her spite. For that when the chance arrived she should be punished, for he had plainly given his instructions before he started, to the effect

that the marquise must be made to feel her lonely position so acutely, that she would be inclined to look kindly on a lover. It was not at all a portion of his programme that she should be hunted into a grave. Moreover, was she not the golden goose that fed them? The regrettable catastrophe was due to the governess's disobedience and malignity. Feminine spite is unreasoning, as all the world knows.

“ Not guessing that she was so sensitive, I went too far and am deeply distressed,” Aglaé mendaciously wrote ; “ not but what the story you will probably hear is much exaggerated. You have impressed on me more than once that you are my friend. By an artful imposture of sham suicide, the marquise has succeeded in frightening her husband back to her side again. They bill and coo all day, which

will not please you any more than it does me. For your own sake, as well as mine, prove that you are my friend, and come."

Yes. Both letters assured him that his presence at Lorge was urgently needed to give form again to chaos ; and Pharamond saw that he must leave the capital, although occurrences in Paris were of daily increasing interest. It was dawning on himself and others at last that they stood on the threshold of an entirely new epoch, which was to shatter and blot out the old ; that what they had chosen to contemptuously take for harmless effervescence was the commencement of convulsion, from which a newly-cast society would spring. The daring of the lower lieges grew as fast as did the fabled bean-stalk. A timid contingent of the assailed upper class had already abandoned France, dreading they

knew not what, and the remainder were like sheep without a shepherd. What if, though really the notion was too preposterous, the bubbling scum should actually suffocate the elect in its foul and fetid waters? In the world's story there have been many cataclysms. Though the peasants of Touraine had done little damage as yet, they would surely hear of the excesses of the south, and would probably be urged to emulation.

Lorge was a strong place, but precautionary measures of defence must be taken in view of prospective difficulties. For many reasons, then, the return of the abbé to the country might no longer be delayed. It would be a wise measure to summon a meeting of the rural seigneurie, and form a league for mutual protection.

“Her friend!” the abbé laughed with

a malevolent twitch of his thin lips as he folded and pocketed his letters. "So long as she is useful, yes—a dear trusty loyal friend—but not an instant longer! If she cannot behave with decency and common prudence, we must unite and sweep her into space."

Everyone was glad to see Pharamond home again, or affected to be so. He assumed the highest spirits, although his news was little reassuring, and he was privately much vexed at the changed positions of his puppets.

The chevalier, when rated for his drunken incapacity, excused himself by swearing that but for his timely outcry, Gabrielle would have perished. He wept alcoholic tears and babbled incoherent nonsense, in which he deplored his numerous transgressions. "If only she could have

loved me," he whimpered with clasped hands more aspen than of yore, "she would have been made so happy, and now she is plunged in misery, and I can do nothing to prevent it. Console her, brother, since you are the favoured one; make her smile again and I will be your slave for life!" and so on, with trickling jeremiads and idle expressions of penitence.

As for mademoiselle, she expressed herself so full of contrition, and so anxious to promote the abbé's suit, and altogether made herself so agreeable, that he pretended loftily to pardon her, registering a private vow that she must be ousted at the earliest moment. A woman who could act so foolishly as to frighten the admirer she intended to cajole, was but a contemptible enemy to battle with in a game of diamond cut diamond. For the

achievement of his own plans he must put up with her just now, and make good the incipient breach. Aglaé must be washed clean in the eyes of the remorseful marquis of having caused his wife's rash act. Whatever might happen by-and-by, the neophyte and his affinity must be brought close together again for a while, and to that end Pharamond loyally exerted all his influence. He fairly laughed his brother into the belief that he was a deluded simpleton ; that the suicide was a stage device got up by Phebus and the victim. "What a ninny to be taken in !" He said, "A bit of jealous temper, nothing more, for which she is sorry now, for she has gained naught by the dramatic ducking except an attack of illness."

Aglaé was gushing in her gratitude, which served only to increase the con-

tempt of Pharamond, who, like her, heartily despised the virtues. She was a tool to be used and blunted, then carelessly thrown away. Meanwhile, she was laughing in her sleeve in that he should so easily be hoodwinked by her comedy. He never guessed what a new and portentous idea was surging in her brain, and she was careful to drop no hint of it.

We will not endeavour to excuse the error in judgment of so accomplished a manipulator of marionnettes as the Abbé Pharamond, in that he should have esteemed so lightly the talents of Mademoiselle Brunelle. Perhaps he was led astray by the crafty display of helplessness shown in her last epistle. You are not inclined to suspect, when a lady candidly confesses weakness and craves help, that she has a private set of schemes in the

background, of which she tells you nothing. As Aglaé was prepared (since she could not help it) to put up with Pharamond for a period, so was the abbé prepared to endure Aglaé until he had quite done with her, feeling less and less doubt that when she was no longer useful he could administer the final push.

Thus schemed the schemers, labouring each for self, masking their batteries one from the other till the propitious moment should come for rupture. If the muse of history had not intervened as Marplot at this moment, there is no telling which way the scale would have turned, for it was nicely balanced. If Pharamond was being deceived, so was Aglaé, for she failed to gauge the extent of the shock she had inflicted on the marquis. He was too timid to express his feelings openly, to

confess that he had become genuinely afraid of his affinity, perceiving that on occasion she could be more unscrupulous than his feeble soul was prepared to contemplate. Even strong-minded men do not care to have a Lady Macbeth in the *ménage* who "lays the daggers ready." He clung to Aglaé because he could not do without her; but at the same time he leaned heavily on Pharamond. But for that muse of history this tale might have had a different ending. The schemes of both conspirators required time. As it was, something happened which awoke them with a start, and entirely changed the face of affairs, for they became aware that what they intended to do must be done quickly or be left undone. The shuttle of the muse flew apace across the loom. An event occurred which came upon the

country like a thunder-clap, spreading terror and dismay in one camp, causing the wildest exultation in the other. Rumour brought the news that their majesties had fled from France.

The situation was so grave that it behoved the country seigneurie to look to themselves in earnest and at once. Perforce dismissing for the moment arrangements of a private nature, Pharamond galloped hither and thither, vastly busy, suggesting, advising, arranging. The Marquis de Gange, much as he disliked politics, was compelled to rouse himself from his ease and his remorse. He became quite energetic; ceased to worry about his wife, and even forgot the tub. Old de Vaux came cantering over on his pony, followed by a multitude of booby squires, who, grouped in solemn conclave in the

banquet-hall of Lorge, sat dumb before the wisdom of the governess. In important deliberations sage counsellors of either sex are to be courted, and Aglaé in all emergencies shone forth with special brilliancy. Her mind worked so nimbly and practically, that the eyes of the enraptured gentry were round with awe. They vowed in chorus that the marquis was a lucky man to have captured this pearl of price. All were agreed, and impressed the fact on him. As there was no dissentient voice, his uneasy terrors waned ; suspicion gave place to a renewal of admiration, in which fear was tempered with respect.

It never occurred to anyone to consult Gabrielle, and she had no desire to be consulted. The white chatelaine knew too well that as a leader she was a failure.

It was enough to feel quite assured at last with numbing, wearing pain, that Clovis cared no jot for her.

That illusion had been put to flight for ever, for she had perceived that his courtesy was awkward and unreal, a mask assumed by sluggish duty to conceal ennui. Well, however evil the fate which should pursue her in the future, she deserved it all, and would accept it meekly as a penance. It was wicked to have made a deliberate attempt upon the life which was not her own to destroy. Each night and morning she fervently prayed for pardon, vowing that she would try to endure all henceforth by aid of such support as was vouchsafed.

Of a sudden there came a second thunder-clap, and the booby squires shut themselves up, each in his own

domain, unable to comprehend its meaning.

Rumour had brought a second budget more disquieting in effect than the first. Their majesties had not succeeded in escaping. They had been caught at Varennes, to be conducted back to Paris by Barnave and Pétion, deputies. The King and Queen of France were prisoners! Actually they were in custody of King Mob—a more powerful potentate than they—who had locked them up in a gilded jail, yclept the Palace of the Tuileries. For a moment all sections of society paused and held their breath.

If Louis and Marie Antoinette had crossed the frontier it would have been to return at the head of an avenging army, which would by force have replaced their

diadems. But prisoners!—for though not dubbed so openly as yet, their power of free action had departed. The innocent king, the unfortunate queen, the saintly Madame Elizabeth, had been drawn through the streets of the capital, a helpless raree-show, for the delectation of the populace, like the Parisian “Boeuf Gras” or the London Guido Fawkes! The scum themselves were so taken aback by the prodigious spectacle that many burst into tears, while others stood dumbfounded. Then, the shock of surprise over, there followed inevitably excess, the boisterous stretching of untried limbs, for the first time free. In some parts of the country this took the form of a meaningless upheaval, just to test the new-found liberty. Chateaux of unpopular proprietors were sacked and burnt. The

dwelling of the de Vaux family was somewhat injured, and its inmates alarmed for their property ; but, at a critical moment, Jean Boulot appeared upon the scene and scornfully rated the rioters for their cowardice. “Shame!” he cried, “ye are indeed worthy of liberty if your first use of it is to slay or insult old men and women! Next, I suppose, you will pay us a visit, and repay with brand and pitch-fork the debt you all owe to the marquise?” The crowd desisted from the work of destruction and shamefacedly dispersed. No, no—they grumbled. Jean Boulot was a fine fellow, to whose harangues they all liked to listen, but his tongue sometimes was sharp, his sayings bitter. Attack Lorge? Never. What! the home of the white chatelaine, whose hands were ever stretched forth to do good, at sight of

whose beautiful sad face everyone sighed with pity?

People are naturally so perverse that they are ever apt to plume themselves upon results that are due to others. The abbé and Mademoiselle Brunelle, and with them the Marquis de Gange, were quite assured that the impunity from attack enjoyed by Lorge was due to the strength of its walls and the ingenuity of their tactics. Jean's speech at Montbazon was not reported to them—he was not one to boast of his own deeds, and they were too infatuated to realize that the pale, weak, fragile woman, whose reserve and resignation daily exasperated Aglaé, was the real author of their safety.



CHAPTER XIII.

DOMESTIC SURGERY.

THESE were exciting times—no doubt of it—even to humdrum provincials, remote from the madding crowd. The web on the muse's loom grew so rapidly that the eye could not follow the shuttle. Were the dogs of war to be unloosed upon the land? Was fair France to be invaded and torn by the enemy from without as well as by one within? On the 6th of July the Emperor of Austria appealed to the sovereigns to unite for the delivery of Louis.

On the 11th a formal

(68)

demand was made in the Constituant Assembly for his dethronement. His majesty's brothers, after having solemnly sworn that they would not leave their native soil, were gone ; and the stream of emigration increased in volume daily. The Minister of War announced that no less than nineteen hundred officers had abandoned their regiments and fled. It was decreed that the property of emigrants should be confiscated for the public good. Meanwhile, the upheaval of the peasantry continued to be intermittent. Sometimes they merely growled ; sometimes they rushed about like madmen, leaving, as locusts do, a trail of destruction in their wake.

Then the question of money, or rather of no money, became a burning one. In October there was a famine and a dead-

lock. Farmers refused to take paper in payment for corn, and somehow there was naught else to pay them with. The occupants of Lorge watched vigilantly, awaiting a crisis which they could not but feel was imminent; and the two conspirators considered their broken plans with the palpitating woe of ants when somebody treads upon their hill. The abbé and the governess consulted frequently, each assuming the ingenuousness of infancy, whilst reconnoitring with wary eye the position of the other. Though they made believe to sit in one boat and caulk it, the attention of either was directed to a private craft (cunningly concealed from sight) in which the other was to find no seat, and which must be rendered taut and trim to face the coming storm.

A conviction that leaks were numerous,

and that there was no time for elaborate operations, oppressed them both; a prophetic instinct whispered that such materials as were at hand must serve, or, when the wind rose presently, their frail coracles would founder and go to the bottom.

The Marquise de Gange was the pivot upon which the schemes of both plotters turned—the listless lady who took no further interest in the world's doings; who, excluded alike from family councils and domestic interests, gave herself up to devotions and to almsgiving.

Time being just now so precious an article, it seemed to both schemers that the victim had been brought into as auspicious a state for operation as was likely to be attained without long waiting. It would, in all probability, become necessary ere long to follow the stream of emigra-

tion, and abandon France till the Saturnalia which convulsed the motherland should have passed away. Now it was clear to Pharamond that prudent persons are bound to prepare themselves for any fate. If Gabrielle accepted his terms, as reflection would doubtless lead her to do, it was obvious that he and she would, some of these days, quietly elope, leaving the husband and his affinity to discover, too late, with teeth - gnashing, that the golden goose was gone. An adroit display of sympathy combined, perhaps, with a gentle and artistic touch of coercion, would bring this about. When the moment for departure came she would follow him, and from a safe point of vantage overtures could be made to the maréchal with regard to the question of finance. Of course, after what she had suffered there, she

would be only too glad to turn her back upon the dismal chateau, which must be as odious to her as to him. What happened to the besotted Clovis and the impudent Aglaé would concern neither any more.

Mademoiselle Brunelle, on the other hand, saw in Gabrielle's condition of indifference the stony numbness of a despair which a trifling amount of pressure would lead to the desired denouement. She would find the hateful world too unbearable, and leave it. The obstacle removed, Aglaé resolved to work with cunning touch on the fears of the timid widower. She would cause him to understand that jeremiads over what was done were useless, or that, at any rate, they might with propriety be postponed until his skin was safe beyond the frontier. It is a first duty to look after one's skin. Gabrielle out of

the way, there was nothing to prevent her successor from taking possession of Clovis with a strong hand, and carrying him off to join the other nobles. This must be accomplished with despatch and secrecy and diplomatic skill. An exactly propitious moment must be chosen. The fate of the abbé and the chevalier, left behind, would concern in no wise the future Marquise de Gange.

Many a clever criminal, when plaiting a rope for his deliverance will leave a strand unsound, and break his leg in a ditch. The pride and delicacy of the marquise had always shrunk from upbraiding Clovis with ingratitude, or of using her wealth as a weapon of self-defence. With misery comes indifference to self. What was money to her, save what she needed for her poor? Since Clovis and

the dear ones were complete without her, and clearly did not want her, wherein would she be bettered by twitching at the purse-strings? Hence, as the subject, being rather unpleasant, was never broached, the governess had never learned that the source of affluence was Gabrielle, and that if the wife were, before the death of old de Brèze, to sink into the grave, the husband would lose all hope of himself fingering the revenues.

Seeing how urgent it was to hit upon a plan of action which should avert impending chaos, both Pharamond and Aglaé secretly and independently resolved to seek a private interview with the marquise which should further prepare the way to a desirable result from their own point of view, or, if destiny proved kindly, clinch the matter of the future.

The first in the field was Pharamond, who, suddenly solicitous for the welfare of his sister-in-law, tapped at her boudoir door.

“ My blessed Gabrielle ! ” he cried, archly shaking a finger. “ You are very very naughty, and I have come to scold you ! At a time when we ought all to hang together you avoid us as if we had the plague, and shun the family councils. Do you not know what is happening ; that we are all tinkering with might and main to prepare our ark for the Deluge ? I am sure the Noah family must have been an united one, or they would never have achieved the task of heralding all those beasts. Just think what a genius for organization some of them must have had ! A pair of each after their kind ! I declare that the

beetles and flies alone would have reduced me to a state of madness!"

Gabrielle had no smile now for the abbé's persiflage.

"You should know," she quietly observed, looking up from her book with a serious wrapt expression which seemed as if reflected from beyond the gates, "that the world and I have parted company. Grief is a slow and painful death which absorbs our stock of endurance."

This was not quite the desirable frame of mind which Pharamond had reckoned on. The screw had been turned too far and must be loosened.

"This mopish place affects your nerves, and no wonder," he said. "Change of air and scene will set you up again."

She glanced at the abbé in quick surprise. "Change of air and scene!" She

feared lest he had come to demand her ultimatum.

“What would you say,” he suggested, “to a tour in Switzerland, with one who would make you happy?”

“No one will ever make me happy,” she returned, composedly, “and yet I have desired a change—should like to go away from here——”

“A la bonheur,” muttered the abbé to himself.

“Where I contemplated going I might achieve content; but then, much as I yearn for it, there are earth-born ties which detain me within these walls, despite my judgment.”

“A fig for such ties!” cried Pharamond with conviction. “Clovis has behaved in a disgraceful way, and you will be fully justified in considering him no

more. Another woman occupies your place. Unless I am mistaken one so proud as you would not deign to thrust her thence by the moving of a finger. Clovis, by his own acts has placed himself beyond the pale. He is out of court. The nobles are leaving France in droves. Common prudence bids you follow."

"I never thought of leaving France," the marquise said, coldly.

"Does Clovis want to go? I have more than once contemplated asking him to permit me to retire to a convent. I know too well," she added, wearily, "that he would not be sorry to be relieved of my presence. But I have not the strength to bid farewell to the children. Though they have been alienated from me by base arts, they have all my single-minded love,

and it is my duty to watch over their well-being."

A convent! Pshaw! How many babble of the cloistered life, chilled by dreariness and disappointment! The poor thing was very lonely—ripe for judicious comforting.

"Their governess is devoted to the little ones and loves them," mused Gabrielle, sadly sighing. "Were I not assured of that I should do something desperate. It would be too much—I could not bear it!"

"Excuse my disrespectful merriment," laughed Pharamond, "but your project is too funny. What! A convent! A mouse trap! My dear, you need rousing to revive your mental tone, which has dropped too low. A commingling of new pleasures and fresh interests is vastly beneficial. In your despondent state you would, within

the living tomb of the cloister, become in a month a hysterical *convulsionnaire*—fit subject for Mesmer's tub! No, no, The world shall not lose its fairest ornament, hidden away out of reach too long. I am here now as your true friend to administer timely counsel. Residence in France is, for the time being, fraught with peril. I propose to escort you to a place of security where you will be free from molestation. There will be no one to worry or torment you as those two have done. Your father learning that you have been induced to fly from an impossible existence, will doubtless join us, and I pledge my honour that the little ones shall follow."

Gabrielle had been listening drearily, her head supported on her hand, as one listens to a tale too often told. But at mention of the children she started, and

the abbé flattered himself that he had hit the bull's-eye. How to secure the infants he had not considered, but if their presence was essential as a tempting bait, why, they could easily be kidnapped.

“ You see, dear Gabrielle,” the abbé whispered drawing his chair close and laying a persuasive hand upon her arm, “ that I have thought of everything. We will make for Switzerland, where you and I and the angels will dwell in paradise. The maréchal is not strait-laced, heaven save the mark, how should he be? and seeing you quite happy, will be satisfied. You are too mopish to act for yourself. Say the delicious word and I will see it all settled in a twinkling.”

He awaited a reply, but it came not. The marquise, engrossed in his word-picture, was gently smiling. She was out

of sorts—too much depressed for decision. This was the instant for a tiny twist of the screw, like a microscopic prick from a spur.

“I see that you have reflected, and that you have made the best selection. That is well. You recall my words before I went away? I meant them then, and mean them still. My will is iron, Gabrielle. A resolve once taken hardens into adamant. Mine you are to be, and mine you will be; so further struggling is useless.”

Still no answer; yet she had had time enough in all conscience to see that there was no escape. The abbé, quite certain of his prey, edged nearer yet till he could inhale the perfume on her hair.

“It is indeed I, and no other, who am to teach you love, my Gabrielle,” he whispered tenderly. “It is written! Mine too

shall be the privilege to return the children to your keeping. You bear me no malice in that I parted you from them for awhile? You know right well that what I have done I can undo. Ha! Your bosom heaves! You yield at last! Was ever woman so strangely wooed——and won!"

It was a favourite theory of the abbé's (which, like many plausible theories, had a crack in it) that in a tussle of two, the weaker must inevitably go under. A female heart, he argued, must perforce be flattered when it finds its citadel besieged with unflagging perseverance. The abbé was radiant, for he had no doubt that his sharp attack must tell on ramparts undermined by prolonged strategy, and that he would reap the reward of his efforts.

Gabrielle rose slowly from her seat, with flushed cheeks and eyes that

sparkled ; but not to fall into his out-stretched and expectant arms.

“ Abbé,” she said, clasping her bosom with her hands, “ you admit that it was you who parted us. What your ingenious cruelty will invent next I dread to think. You did well to name my dear ones. But for them you might have had your way, perhaps, since I care not what becomes of me. You would persuade me to fly with you, and hold them out as a lure ? A grievous error, abbé ; they are my buckler ! They will grow up, a blooming youth and maiden, will learn by degrees to gauge this sordid world. What would their opinion be, think you, of a mother who abandoned her home and her honour to gratify a son of the Church ? ”

The beacon of green-gray light, which the chevalier knew so well, shone out for

an instant and was gone. It began to strike the abbé, with a surge of impotent rage, that he might have been wrong in his calculations ; that some long-suffering and apparently defenceless women possess an occult strength against which a will of tempered steel may beat in vain ; and a suspicion of defeat at the moment of expected victory sent a fume of wrath into his brain that made him dizzy.

“Take care !” he muttered, hoarsely. “That I have already done is nothing ! I have wooed you long, and in the end you shall give way—I swear it !”

“Wickedness and conceit disturb your reason,” Gabrielle replied, with a calm which increased his fury. “The crafty and unscrupulous often over-reach themselves. Therein lies the salvation of those who have naught but innocence for armour.”

She looked him in the face with such steady scorn, that his shifty eyes lowered before hers. It came upon Pharamond with a shock, that she whom he had thought to dominate by a skilful mixture of the bitter and the sweet was not the least afraid of him, although she realised too well that to gratify his passions he would stick at nothing. One by one he had cut off from her the joys of life, and the slow cruel process had turned his sword edge. He was nettled and humiliated by the conviction that his boasted knowledge of the feminine organism was moonshine, and that the error into which he had fallen—and which must lie at his own door—was possibly irremediable. To be baffled now, when he had deemed all secure; to be shown with withering contempt, that he would never have his

way! It was too late to turn a new leaf and commence again at the beginning. And the immediate future so ominously dark! A resistance so cool and deliberate and unexpected, shivered his plans at a blow. Well. Baffled he might be, but she should rue the day. If in the duel, she was to prove victorious, with a bitterness as of gall would he execrate this woman! Is it possible to love and hate at the same time? As Pharamond glanced at the tall figure and defiant bearing of the marquise, his desire for her tingled along each nerve, and yet he hated her for that mien of stubborn scorn. She should rue that day—oh, yes, she should rue it! Some excruciatingly ingenious retaliation should be devised. The proud beauty should be whipped till each limb quivered. She had confessed to apprehension of his

inventive powers ; she should feel their effect, and speedily.

Gabrielle was able apparently to read his white and vindictive visage. Without blenching, she observed, mournfully, “ I spoke at random, when I said I dreaded you ; what is there left for me to dread ? I have passed along the stony path of the black valley of the shadow, and, thanks to you, nothing can affect me now. I defy you to do your worst. Having bereft me of children and husband, what is there left for me to bear ? Whatever you may devise, I shall thank heaven for the burthen as a merciful atonement for my sin.”

“ You scoff at my love and brave my hate ! ” returned the abbé, striving hard to control his voice. “ You have finally refused the one, and for the first time shall know the other.”

“I despise both. To me you are more vile a reptile than the bloated hideous toad from which by instinct we recoil. Your poisonous breath infects the air; your vampire face insults God’s image. In place of the abject thing which you call love, and which I rightly spurned, you offer hate? So much the better. As the more honest I accept it.”

“You have spoken your own sentence. A day will come when you shall sue for mercy and find none!”

“Never! Go!”

With a frown and a superb motion of her matchless arm, Gabrielle pointed at the door. In the excitement of indignation and defiance, the marquise was more beautiful than ever. Pharamond fairly writhed in his desire and his rage. She should be his—by force, if need be; but

his—his! And after that, to revenge this scorn, he would fling her in the gutter to rot there! Stung to the quick—torn by ravening passions, evil both—the abbé bowed mechanically, and, scowling, left the room.

If he had seen how swiftly she collapsed when the door closed, he might have hoped again, for she was a fragile creature, borne up by pride and a pure love that was beyond his sordid ken.

“What will he do? What will he do?” she moaned, trembling, as she crouched down upon a seat. “What hideous form will his revenge take? Shall I implore the protection of my husband?”

And then she reflected moodily about that said husband, as she had at last learned to know him. Selfish and self-indulgent to the core—heartless, too, or he

could not survey his wife's sufferings with such perfect equanimity. True, he knew little about her, and troubled less. If he had not again dismissed her from his mind he could not but perceive her suffering. He was infatuated by that dreadful woman, and further beguiled astray by his insidious brother. No help was to be expected from him, or, indeed, from any one. She had boldly defied the abbé. Would she be given strength to fight? Alas, alas! Did she not know too well that she was not made for fighting? Where, then, to look for assistance? Rising, she slowly paced the room, and thought Heaven was cruel. Why not have let her die? Sure 'tis a venial sin to put off what one cannot bear? We can feel for ourselves with the instinct with which we are endowed, that the burthen is too great.

Heaven is busy with other things—too indifferent to know or care what we poor pygmies feel. She paused in her walk before a mirror and shook her head at the pale and drawn reflexion. “Oh ! fatal gift of beauty,” she murmured, “ which men pretend to worship, swearing that ’tis a glimpse of paradise. It is a devil’s gift ; for its province is to stir the foulest lees of the base human soul and set them festering.”

What was she to do—what to expect ? Perhaps he had already invented and set going some new plan to torture her. Would she have done better, being but a helpless, tempest-tossed sport of destiny, to have surrendered, pleading her weakness and his strength ? Had he not touched on the cherubs, she might have given way for very weariness ; but they,

as she had declared, were her buckler. They wist not of her, nor cared, being transferred to other hands, and yet they stood 'twixt her and the precipice. Then she fell a thinking of Victor and pretty Camille. When they grew up they would seek their mother. Would they not? If not, why live? Better—better far—to die. Yes: Heaven had been cruel—very, very cruel!

Suspecting nothing of the abbé's move, Mademoiselle Brunelle resolved on that very self-same morning to operate on her own account. She made her way boldly to the boudoir, and without knocking, entered. Gabrielle started, and dried her eyes. The woman dared to invade her sanctuary. For what purpose? In her highly-strung condition of despairing nervousness, it seemed to Gabrielle that

the governess looked as wicked and as menacing as the abbé.

In truth there was a sour curl about her lips that was not becoming. The marquise, as white as a sheet, in tears? Crying her eyes out in solitude—the whining idiot! That so weak and contemptible an obstacle should be allowed to stand between herself and her ambition was preposterous. Well, the victim should be given the wrench which should impel her to retire from the scene.

“I want to talk to you about affairs,” Aglaé began. “Since you do not ask me to sit, I will choose a chair myself.”

So saying, she subsided into the most inviting fauteuil and assumed a pose of studied insolence.

“I congratulate madame on her humility,” observed the governess, in her

rolling bass, with a condescending head-shake. “The Christian virtues are rare, alas, just now in persons of your birth and breeding.”

“To what do I owe this visit?” demanded the marquise, stretching her hand towards the bell-rope.

“Do not ring; you will regret it,” returned the other. “For all our sakes, I would not have you despised by the domestics, if I can help it. You are so apathetic to the stirring history which is being made under your very nose that I am compelled to enlighten your lamentably darkened mind. It is quite on the cards that we may find it convenient to leave Lorge until the storm that threatens is past. By the dear marquis’s wish I and the sweet children will accompany him into temporary banishment, and it becomes

necessary to know what madame will do in that contingency. Of course she is a free agent to go where she pleases, and the marquis is too good and generous not to see that she is well provided for. It is best for madame to know that her presence with us would, for various reasons, be inconvenient—calculated, indeed, to produce scandal, which, for the sake of monsieur and the little ones, madame will desire to avoid."

What snake was there rustling beneath the leaves?

"Is this an ambassage from the Marquis de Gange?" enquired Gabrielle.

"His interests and mine have become identical," drawled mademoiselle, "as madame is no doubt aware, and when I speak it is for both."

"I will go to him myself!" exclaimed

the outraged marquise with trembling lips. “He should know that betwixt himself and his wife no ambassador is needed.”

Aglaé raised her bushy brows and critically contemplating the aspen figure before her, laughed.

“How lamentable that madame should take no interest in what is passing,” she exclaimed. “She knows so little of her husband as to be unaware that he has gone to Blois on business and will not return until to-morrow.”

Could Clovis really have been base enough to confide such a mission as this to the governess, running off meanwhile himself like a coward? Was he bent on withering every leaf of her true love that still struggled for existence? She could scarce believe it even now.

“Madame had better listen and be

calm," suggested Aglaé. "It is always better to be calm."

"Wherever they may go, my place is with my husband and my children," the marquise replied with dignity.

"Cannot madame perceive a troublesome *nuance*, which, in another place, might make her position uncomfortable?"

"Enough of this impertinence," returned the other, sternly. "You forget that you are my servant, to be dismissed at pleasure. Speak plainly and briefly, or I will have you ejected by the valets."

"Impertinent, am I?" cried mademoiselle, losing her temper. "Since you wish it, I will speak plainly. Here, within these gaunt grey walls, what passes within concerns nobody without; but if we should have to fly—which may or may not prove

expedient—we shall be dwelling in a public place, where others will criticise our acts. It will be said that the Marquise de Gange is a mean-spirited creature to eat her bread on sufferance at the table of a man who hates her, and of his mistress who treats her with contumely. That is what will be said of the pretty, empty-headed doll who was too stupid to hold her place as the reigning belle of Paris. They will also say that she is bad, as well as mean, to have abandoned her own offspring to the mistress to mould according to her fancy. Madame will probably now perceive that her presence with us anywhere except in the privacy of Lorge, will be an abiding source of scandal."

His mistress! The brazen wretch!—confessed—nay, gloried—in her shame; and the unhappy wife had striven so hard

to believe that there was nothing but *camaraderie* between them.

“ You wicked, wicked woman ! ” Gabrielle gasped, choking. “ I have never wittingly done you aught but kindness. You are a fiend.”

“ A fiend ! ” echoed Aglaé, amused, stretching herself luxuriously with loose limbs as the tigress does, while she proceeded.

“ Every female envelope contains an angel and a devil combating ; which gains the mastery depends upon the men, who, I regret to say, are usually guided by the lowest motives. That is an elementary lesson which I think I shall teach Camille. I shall teach the darling many curious things before I’ve done with her.”

A hit—a palpable hit, which went straight to the quivering goal. It was a

fact that the future of the dear ones was in this monster's keeping. She was as evil as the abbé. If it suited her she would not scruple to sow in their white souls the seeds of vice. How appalling! Forgetful always of herself, the mother had striven to be comforted with the assurance that though she was thrust forth from Eden, those she adored were well guarded. The woman's conduct, as far as concerned the children, had been irreproachable: she had treated them with affection; but knowing her now as she really was, Gabrielle could see with a thrill of dismay that she was unencumbered by such scruples as keep ordinary mortals in check; was governed by expediency alone.

The marquise sat for awhile without movement, but her rival was not slow to mark with satisfaction the exceeding pallor

of her lips and the horror in her distended eyes. That the sword-thrust had pierced too deep escaped her ken : she failed to see that the whole being of the victim had undergone so violent a convulsion as to produce quite a different result from that which she expected. The courage she lacked for her own succour could be aroused in behalf of others, whom she loved better than herself. It was as by a miracle a naked and defenceless combatant were of a sudden sheathed in armour.

Aglaë sat waiting, fully aware that having made an effective point, you should allow it to take effect. She waited, and beguiled the time by considering what she would do when married. It would be pleasant to play chatelaine for a month or so each year, even at gloomy Lorge, so soon as the country should be quieted.

The puling thing on the sofa yonder was stricken under the fifth rib, would totter into a thicket presently and perish, as was intended. What a cleverly imagined stroke it had been to hint at the depraving of the prodigies—a stroke as of a sledge-hammer, to batter in the apology for brains vouchsafed to such despicable objects.

Gabrielle remained so long in apparent torpor, while the Medusan horror on her face permanently hardened there, that the enemy waxed impatient. It is indecent for the stricken stag to lie down where shot. Decorum bids him conceal himself in the bracken—make a move of some sort to veil his agonies. Gabrielle being too crushed to make a motion must be stirred up with an eleemosynary stab.

“We will come to an arrangement,” mademoiselle suggested cheerfully, “with-

out troubling our dear marquis on the subject. Go away somewhere—to some nice place which we will engage never to visit, and I will promise never to teach anything naughty either to Victor or Camille. Refuse, and—well—h-m!"

"Oh! the wicked, wicked woman!" the marquise ejaculated, inwardly. "There must be a hell somewhere for the punishing of such villainous dastards." But in her new-born strength, the possession of which was unaccountable and amazing, she found herself enabled to smile sadly, and remark, without a tremor in her voice, "You will leave me now, if you please, and give me time to think."

That was reasonable, and desirable to boot. The more she thought, the better would she comprehend that she was hemmed in, undone; that a certain wherry

was swinging on the tide, under which was a soft bed preparing.

“By all means,” returned the enemy, with bonhomie. “Take time, my dear; but you must not be too long deciding. A little friendly counsel before I go: when *our* Clovis comes back to-morrow—for, oddly enough, he is for the present *ours*—better say nothing, you have disgusted him enough already.”

With that she waved a light adieu, and ere long her bass voice was to be heard in the corridor, accompanying the joyous treble of her shouting charges engaged in a game of romps.

What a day’s experience—a day to sear the brain and blanch the hair with silver. Gabrielle, her hands tight clasped behind her back, strode up and down the long saloon deeply immersed in thought,

quite calm and self-possessed. The time for impulsive moaning and mad frenzy was gone by. Drowsy reason stood upright and alert upon her throne. At any cost of pain to herself or others duty must be done—the little ones rescued from the ogress. Even the dear father must for their sakes bear his share of the burthen. It was decreed. He must learn the truth, which she had hoped would lie buried in her grave. Victor, Camille ; their blythe merriment in the corridor was an eloquent sermon. Up to now—all thanks to Heaven for it—they were unsmirched by aught of evil, their sky sunny and unclouded. Instinct told their mother that the ogress, by some paradox, was capable of some measure of wholesome affection, and would do them no injury unless it were necessary to strike through them at

her. The new fledged diplomat must temporize—gain time. A power of dissimulation, to which hitherto she had been a stranger, was developing itself in Gabrielle. The dear father—he would be terribly concerned — would arrive post-haste, wreak vengeance on those who had so nearly slain his child, bear away her and his grandchildren to safety.

Gabrielle locked herself in her bedroom, and wrote with feverish energy. The pen flew over the sheets and covered them with close writing that told a piteous tale. Toinon, who knew that in the absence of my lord, both abbé and governess had been persecuting her mistress, tried the door once or twice, and, receiving no response to her knocks, grew so seriously alarmed, that she dashed off in search of Jean Boulot, dreading some new

catastrophe. Just as the latter appeared with a hatchet in his grasp, and anxious lines upon his brow, the door opened, and the chatelaine herself stood on the threshold holding a letter.

She was flushed with fever, but quite self-possessed. With a strange smile she beckoned them both in, and again turned the key in the lock.

“Something has happened, dear good friends, whom I can trust,” she explained, rapidly. “Something so terrible, that I cannot tell it you. I am still scared and horrified, but Heaven permits me to retain my senses. Jean, for love of me and mine, you will saddle your horse and ride leisurely to Onzain, as though bent on ordinary business; and there engage with the *Maître de Poste* to send this letter by special courier. He must take

no rest till he reaches Paris. Two precious souls — three — depend on punctual obedience. I may trust you, Jean? Let none suspect your mission."

Honest Jean sank on one knee and pressed the hot hand of the chatelaine to his lips with reverence. "My life is madame's," he said simply, and went.

"Embrace me, my Toinon," Gabrielle cried, falling on the neck of her foster-sister in a paroxysm of hysterical weeping. "I have been for years in a foolish day-dream. I am awake now to sleep no more."

Toinon was mystified, but could gather that the terrible emotion of the marquise relieved her pent feelings, and was as salutary as timely bleeding to the apoplectic. After a brief space she grew better, and could smile like a ghost of her old self.

The die was cast. She would be relieved of nightmare. Her affection for her husband was burned quite away, and, as its ashes paled, her love for the little ones shot up the purer.





CHAPTER XIV.

CHECK.

GABRIELLE learned to practise her new art so well that day followed day in usual routine without suspicion being aroused of the bold thing she had done. It occurred to none of the party that under the same exterior she was another woman. She went her ways as before, displaying, perhaps, an increased activity, visiting the distressed, administering to the sick. Mademoiselle Brunelle was puzzled, and watched her in idle surprise, marvelling that the squeeze, so carefully calculated,

(112)

should so signally have failed in its effect. What a low mania the mawkish creature was displaying for dirty wretches clad in rags ! That thing a marquise ! To crush one who was so unworthy of her place would be quite a virtuous action, as virtue was understood by Aglaé. The squeeze having proved insufficient for the purpose, another must be applied. It was difficult to determine what form the pressure was to take, since the lady was so craven and mean spirited. Aglaé had declared to her face that the marquis was her lover—which was not true ; had spoken of corrupting little Camille, whose mother, shocked for the moment, had, as it appeared, got used to the abominable idea with singular rapidity. The ever-increasing scorn of the governess was mingled now with disdain of a more positive kind

for the pusillanimity of the destined victim.

The family councils had resulted in abdication of authority on the part of Clovis, who loved his ease, and was only too glad to escape from politics. How should he cope with two such clever heads as those of Aglaé and Pharamond? The clever pair was in perfect accord as to what should be done under given circumstances. The governess gently lured him back to his accustomed pursuits and studies, and his conscience ceased by degrees to pinch him.

Unknown to each other, the private scheme of each of the conspirators had miscarried, and both felt that the next move must be made with exceeding caution. Hence they were to outward seeming extremely friendly, whilst hating

each other with a healthy loathing ; making believe to have all ideas in common, carefully concealing any desire suddenly to depart from Lorge.

By suggestion of the affinity, they had taken to breakfasting in the study, where the morning sun shone in, a cosy party of four, in which Gabrielle was not included. During the meal the abbé would discuss the latest rumour with the lady at the head of the table in amicable fashion, or join with her in arguing some point arising out of Mesmer's letters. The sage was as dissatisfied as his pupil at the non-appreciation of his discovery. For the miraculous cure of the baron's sciatic nerve had found no favour with the peasantry of Touraine, who vowed it was a perilous thing to allow the devil to tamper with scourges sent from Heaven. That party

requires little encouragement, as all the world knows, and that it was he who had worked the cure was evident, since the musicians, ere they ran away, had counted the hairs in his tail. Could there be any doubt that without witchcraft or direct aid from the evil one, no tubful of bottles could affect a gentleman's rheumatism? If there had been a sprinkling of holy water by the good priest, as Madame la Baronne had piously wished, it would have been quite another affair. But iron filings and a violoncello! had not the curé preached on the very next Sunday on the subject of Satanic miracles?

Clovis was heartily disgusted with the crassness of the bucolic ignorance and the pig-headedness of its obstinacy, and gave a willing ear to Aglaé's secret hints that it might be well, some of these days, to

transplant the magic tub to some more enlightened centre.

She was always right—clear-headed, far-seeing Aglaé ! He understood now that the suggestion which had affrighted him on the night of the attempted suicide had merely been an ebullition of over-boiling zeal. She, had felt a genuine interest in him ; had perceived that the marquise was no fitting helpmeet for a *savant*, and had been unable to conceal regret that he should not have been freed from a weight which clogged his scientific usefulness. Over-zeal, as Richelieu remarked, is productive of more harm than good, but it should be treated with indulgence in that it springs from laudable intentions. It was wrong to have said that the chatelaine should have been left to drown. But in his heart of hearts, Clovis began to

confess to himself that the caresses of the patient during convalescence had been well-nigh unbearable, and that if Heaven thought well to take her in a natural way, it would be a relief rather than otherwise.

The even tenour of *déjeuner* was disturbed one morning by the announcement that a travelling berline was coming up the road, and that an old gentleman was looking from its window. A travelling berline, covered thick with dust, too! Not a neighbour, then. Who could it be that presumed to invade their monastic privacy? A messenger from Paris, perhaps. Had something awful happened? The abbé and the governess glanced at each other suspiciously, the same unspoken thought occurring to both. Was the crisis come before they were prepared? If so, the idea of ousting the

other one must be abandoned, and a yet closer alliance formed.

“Monsieur Galland,” announced a servant. None of those present had ever heard the name. Who was he? Whence and from whom had he come?

The gentleman entered, and bowed gravely to the company. A spare, tall old man, who, despite the march of fashion, wore his hair curled and powdered. He was clad in plain black cloth, with woollen stockings and black buckles. A most respectable person, evidently. Would he be good enough to state his business? He took a chair, accepted a cup of coffee, and, fixing his eyes on the portly Aglaé, in what she considered an offensive and marked manner, explained that he was a solicitor. A solicitor? There was no law suit pending that anyone was aware.

What? The confidential man of business of Monsieur le Maréchal de Brèze, who was, unfortunately, ill in bed. The grave gentleman trusted that the maréchal's daughter was not also indisposed. To his regret he perceived that she was absent from the morning meal of the family.

Again Pharamond and Aglaé glanced at each other. What could the old man have to say which could not be communicated by letter?

Clovis blushed, and looked for assistance to the abbé. It came upon him suddenly that what had grown to be quite natural to him, would be rather difficult to explain to a stranger.

“Madame la Marquise is an angel of charity,” demurely remarked the abbé, “who repudiates the innocent comforts of this life to give the more time to others.

She grudges the hour we waste in dallying, and prefers to breakfast alone."

"We all know that madame is an angel," agreed the grave stranger; "much too good for this world."

The company looked one at another in growing uneasiness. There was something unpleasant coming. It was odd that the announcement of Gabrielle's being an angel should make them all feel guilty. The chevalier sighed and wheezed. Clovis's colour deepened. The abbé drummed his fingers on the cloth, annoyed. The governess scrutinised the stranger with lowering brow, for instinct whispered that something had been kept back from her, and that it was on her account he had come.

"Will monsieur kindly explain his business?" enquired the abbé, with his

sweetest smile. “Of course, any emissary from one who has all our respect and affection is most welcome at his chateau of Lorge. Yet we cannot expect that our poor attractions should lure anyone to so quiet a retreat.”

“His chateau of Lorge?” thought the governess, surprised. “Surely it belongs to the marquis?”

“I hope M. de Brèze is not seriously ill?” asked Clovis, with an effort. It was incumbent on him to say something.

“Too indisposed, unfortunately, to travel, even on important business. You are aware that Madame la Marquise has made a communication to her father?”

If a cannon ball had dropped through the ceiling, the company could not have looked more startled. The solicitor smiled, and then grew graver than before.

There was consternation on every face. The position of the marquise was evidently more serious even than she had said. The letter had been sent clandestinely, or it would have been suppressed.

“The communication was a sad blow to the maréchal,” the solicitor continued quietly, “and increased the fever under which he suffered. Nevertheless, he would be here himself had not the doctors and Madame la Maréchale almost employed force. It is as well that the marquise should happen to be absent, for it makes my task the easier. Plainly, marquis, M de Brèze demands the instant dismissal of a person in your employ who has seriously offended his daughter.”

Aglaé's massive jaw dropped in dumb amazement, while the abbé shot at her a covert glance of white hot malevolence.

She had been up to some nefarious prank on her own account, unknown to him : had spoiled his game as well as her own. His frail fingers writhed like adders under the table. How he would have liked to strangle her.

“ I—offend madame ? ” faltered the governess, dumbfounded.

The ground was slipping from beneath her. By what right could the old gentleman in Paris send so peremptory a demand to his son-in-law ? The sly minx was not so mean-spirited after all. Who could have supposed her capable of turning the tables, by secretly sending for her father ? Aglaé looked at the marquis, whose face was dark as a thunder-cloud. Gaining courage from a certainty of his support, she added, toying carelessly with a coffee-spoon—

“I have always done my duty by madame’s children, whom she never looked after herself. I was engaged by M. le Marquis, who has expressed himself satisfied with my efforts.”

“Do I understand that mademoiselle declines to go?” enquired the solicitor. “M. le Marquis is strangely silent. Shall I, to my infinite regret, be compelled to carry out my instructions in full?”

The stranger dared to threaten the Marquis de Gange!

Mademoiselle Brunelle glanced furtively at the abbé, who glared at her. She was bewildered, possessing no key to the puzzle.

“My instructions are,” pursued the solicitor, “to see the dismissed person off the premises, within two hours. In the event of her refusing to go, M. le Marquis

is to be informed, that I am to remove Madame la Marquise at once, and that, if she is detained it will be the painful duty of the Maréchal de Brèze to prosecute certain individuals, whom I need not designate, for conspiracy and cruelty. The officers of law at Blois have their instructions. If the dismissed person does not present herself there within a given time to receive her wages, or if I do not arrive in the company of Madame la Marquise, the officers will come here and demand admittance to the premises belonging to the maréchal. I am glad to be informed that madame is universally beloved. A whisper that she received cruel treatment would rouse the province, and this I need scarcely observe, is not the moment for a collision with the *tiers état*."

Excellently planned. The abbé, a good critic of such matters, was filled with appreciative admiration, although he was to be one of the sufferers. Aglaé had been guilty of some prodigious blunder for which she was to be justly punished. That was well, for in acting independently of him, she had broken a solemn promise. He also, he admitted inwardly, had not displayed his usual astuteness. Doubtless her intense horror of him had helped to goad the victim to that which he had falsely judged she would never do. Then a sense that she had shaken herself free of him, aroused a new access of impotent fury in his breast. She had defied his hate as well as his love, and he shivered with malignant spite at the idea, that by claiming her father's protection she had baffled him.

Clovis felt more angry than ever in his

life before. It was a revelation of an unpleasant kind to find himself in leading strings ; the state of dependence of which the abbé hinted long ago, to be ordered like a lacquey, to be threatened and brow-beaten in the presence of others—he, Marquis de Gange, above all, under the eyes of the affinity, and to be powerless to return blow for blow. To be so degraded and humiliated, and at the instance of his own wife ! It was some moments ere he could control the whirlwind of emotions sufficiently to command his voice.

“ Am I to gather,” he at length said, huskily, “ that Madame la Marquise requires a separation ? I am surprised, for she has never spoken on the subject. What if I refuse, and claim my marital rights ? ”

“ It is always such angels as she,” the

solicitor observed sternly, “who are doomed to earthly matyrdom at the hands of wicked men. Your rights! And what of hers? You have compelled her to dwell under one roof with a designing wanton. You have deprived her of access to her children. After that mere neglect may count for nothing. I am sorry to say that all madame demands is the dismissal of that woman, free access to the children, and a show of respect from you. So much being conceded, bygones are to be bygones. Her terms refused, she will leave your roof, her father will withdraw supplies from you, and give you notice to quit his property.”

Then the money was the old man’s, and not the marquis’s. Aglaé hated everybody, herself included, at thought of how she had been duped.

“I will go when you will,” she said, preparing to withdraw, with a whimsical attempt to don a martyr’s chaplet. “I thank the marquis for his many kindnesses. May I have a moment to embrace the cherubs? I am glad to think that they will miss me more than anyone. As for madame, I can only pity her delusions, knowing that she will be sorry some day when she comes to know me better.”

At this juncture the door opened, and Gabrielle entered in her riding habit, pale but composed. Without noticing the others, she advanced quickly to the new-comer and held forth her hand.

“Dear M. Galland,” she said. “My father!—”

“Was sorely troubled by what you wrote to him.”

"I feared it," she replied dejectedly.
"But there were reasons."

"Reasons!" cried the old gentleman with warmth. "I can read the reasons in your saddened face. I am sorry to be unable to congratulate madame upon her blooming looks. She was wrong not to have spoken sooner."

"I could not," pleaded Gabrielle. "It takes long for a loyal love to smoulder out of life. I could have borne all, if she there had not threatened to instil poison into a child's mind. Just think of it! My God! How monstrous!"

"She never did that," Clovis put in hotly. "Never, never! You may see the children yourself, sir, and question them. Such a calumny is atrocious!"

"Thanks! Oh — thanks for that!" murmured the deep tones of mademoiselle,

as with theatrical gesture she hastily knelt and kissed his hand. "When I have been chased away, it will be a comfort to remember that I never lost your confidence."

"In this affair, I play a pretty part!" exclaimed the marquis, bitterly.

"Between us," Gabrielle said mournfully, gazing at her husband's averted back as he crouched in his fauteuil, "all is over. We are hopelessly divided. And yet, take comfort. In years to come, maybe, when Victor and Camille are man and woman, we may be joined again by them. Mademoiselle, I wish no harm to you—only that after this day we may never come face to face."

Unaccustomed tears stood on the seamed cheeks of M. Galland. It was well that fiery old de Brèze had not arrived

in person. The visage of the white chate-laine told such a tale that bloodshed might have ensued which all would have deplored. The interview was painful, and it behoved him to cut it short.

“If the person intends to obey orders,” the solicitor said curtly, looking at his watch, “she had better waste no time. Such clothes as she cannot pack quickly will be sent after her. I have messages from your father, marquise, that must not be delivered here. Might I ask the favour of being conducted to the nursery, that I may make faithful reports to my employer?”

Aglaé bit her lips. This was a cunning stroke to present a theatrical display, *à la Medea*. Gabrielle consented gratefully, and led the way, leaving the marquis tingling with humbled vanity, and a reawakened remorse that would not be quieted.

His face was buried in his hands, and he was too absorbed in the contemplation of his own outraged self to attend to the woes of others.

Aglaé sidled up to the abbé timidly. Her usual masterful confidence had melted into air.

“Is there no hope?” she whispered.

“None!” was the blunt rejoinder. “You must submit to instant banishment, which serves you right. So it was you who, by your besotted folly drove her to this? I hope you will die in penury. Idiot! Not to know that the vilest animal will turn if threatened in its offspring.”

Of course, the abbé was just the man to jump upon the fallen! Was it her fault that she had been kept in the dark with regard to circumstances, which, if known, would have changed her tactics? All was

not lost. It was but a temporary defeat such as the most skilful generals must submit to sometimes. It would not do to quarrel openly with the abbé, though, in her trouble he was behaving like a brute. Therefore, while wreathing her face in smiles, she registered an inward vow to remember, and be bitterly revenged some day.

“*Sans rancune!*” she said lightly, holding out her large brown hand. “You are not merciful, but I forgive you: am I not admirably generous? You think I am cast out for ever. A grievous mistake; so we had best still be friends. Look at him. He is chafing now, wincing under the whip thong. In the distractions of the capital he might forget me. Here he will miss me and be sorry.”

It was likely that in that much she was

right. The house of cards had been kicked over by her clumsy foot, and must be recommenced from the foundations. Who could foretell what the stormy future might bring forth? It was politic to keep on civil terms with one who might yet prove formidable—or useful.

The chevalier, who could read things hazily, as in the dark with a horn lantern, wondered why his brother was so civil to the routed one. He led her to the carriage with a ceremony suited to an archduchess, and stood under the archway where the portcullis used to hang, airily kissing his finger-tips till the berline was out of sight.



CHAPTER XV.

THE SITUATION CHANGES.

GABRIELLE's injunctions to Monsieur Galland were concise. The maréchal must not be told too much. The good solicitor must keep to himself her worn and haggard aspect. Nor must he relate aught of the eloquent meeting between the mother and her dear ones. The children looked on her with a vague alarm as on one of whom they had learned to be suspicious from hearing unpleasant things. He had been obliged to wipe away another tear—it was a wonder that there remained so much liquid in one so dry and

shrunken—ere he stole from the room on tiptoe, leaving the yearning heart to recover its lost sway.

And now began for Madame de Gange a lull of peace, and as her troubled soul regained its equilibrium she marvelled that she should have been patient for so long. The dear father's mandate had been a wand of harlequin transforming with a touch the Cave of the Black Gnome into the Calm Retreat of the Serene Spirit. For several months nothing occurred that was of import to the recluses. By a seeming paradox, the remnants of the affection she had once borne her husband being destroyed, she found that she could get on better with him. There were no more throes of jealousy, no irritating scenes, no midnight weepings with the morning reproach of swollen eyelids—

simply because she had renounced a desire for the moon, as he had so often wished she might. That he should shut himself up in his study and pore over the secrets of science, avoiding his better half, was no longer a cause for grief; she cared no more how this time was passed. Had she not got back the stolen treasures in whose interest alone she prayed for a span of life? For many weary months she had been bereaved, and it was an intense delight—a dazzling peep into heaven—to have them once again all to herself with no shadow to fall between. What a joy to mark how the minds of Victor and Camille had expanded in the interval; how the young plants had shot up, putting out fresh leaves of tender green and fragrant blossoms of rich intelligence. The mother thanked God that, search as anxiously as

she might, she could find no trace of evil in the children's minds. The singular specimen of womanhood, who happily was gone for ever, had been a real mother to them, had tended them as if they were her own, had packed in the little heads a store of information that to Gabrielle was a source of awe. A very curious mixture was Mademoiselle Brunelle. What she had herself remarked as to the conflicting elements in the female bosom was more true than the conclusion which followed. Whether the angel or the devil obtains mastery does not always depend upon a man. In this case it depended on a woman—Gabrielle. If she had been drowned, Aglaé would, no doubt, have been a model stepmother, and have done everything in her power for the advantage of the young ones. It was her hatred of

the chatelaine, due to the misreading of her character, that had put the thought into her head of hurting them in order to inflict pain on her. Perhaps, it was no more than an idle threat to instil terror. When the moment came she would perchance have held her hand and spared them. Perhaps too rough a contact with the sharp edges of the jagged world in early life had warped a nature that was intended to be genial. As she considered these things the forgiving Gabrielle freely pardoned her tormentor for the many stabs she had inflicted. Fear and horror gave place to holy pity, and she resolved to use her influence to procure for her another situation. With suitable surroundings she might succeed in banishing the devil. Those surroundings she had not found at Lorge. That short volume of its sinister

history was closed, and must never be re-opened. Whatever else might happen Mademoiselle Aglaé Brunelle must never revisit Lorge.

The magic wand of the old maréchal had even produced an effect upon the abbé. Either he had been frightened into good behaviour, or he had been induced to smother his unholy passion and forego his campaign of menaces. A few days after Aglaé's defeat, during which time he had been ostentatiously humble and obliging, he paid another visit to the chatelaine in her boudoir. For a moment she held her breath. Was the persecution to recommence? As he had never threatened harm to the dear ones, she had spared him in her letter to her father. Must she again cause him sorrow by seeking protection against her husband's brother?

No ; heaven was very merciful, and had quite withdrawn its galling hand. The abbé presented himself before her in a new light. His sweet voice was pitched in its most melodious key. His intellectual visage was scored with furrows of anxiety and contrition. He frankly confessed his sins, and humbly craved forgiveness, while tears poured down his cheeks.

“ I was mad—driven quite out of myself by your marvellous beauty, Gabrielle,” he murmured, in broken accents. “ Believe me if you can, after the past, that I am not altogether bad. Forgiveness is a divine attribute which will well become your angelic nature. Like him from whom the unclean spirit was cast, I no longer shriek, and howl, and tear my flesh, but am subdued, clothed, and in my right

mind again. I look upon my other self with horror, and praise God for the miracle whereby I am saved. Pardon, Gabrielle ; without it I shall never know another instant's peace."

The marquise was much moved by the appeal. She had liked the man and enjoyed his society until, as he explained, he had gone mad. Who was she, who had erred in so many things—had even been so wicked as to try to take her life—that she should punish one who repented ?

He had muttered something about going away, removing from her path his execrated presence ; had even said with thrilling sadness that he firmly purposed to seek the cloister, and commence a life of penance. She, too, had once thought of the cloister. Indeed, it was upon that hint that Pharamond was acting now ; for, alas,

alas, the astute one was but playing a new rôle, preparing new foundations for his tumbled house of cards.

It is grievous for the historian to relate that this brilliant son of the Church was altogether heartless. He, who could prate so prettily about forgiveness, had not a grain of pity in his composition. Can a man love and hate at the same time? he had asked himself. No; but he had mistaken a vile grovelling feeling born of ignoble sensuality for love, and that feeling could run in harness in perfect accord side by side with hatred. His beautiful sister-in-law had flouted him, had foiled him, had, with sublime disdain, flung his threats in his face. She had plainly shown him how high above his foul and leprous baseness soared her own simple purity. We may be aware that we are grovelling and vile,

and deserve to be held up to the contempt of our fellows in our native ugliness. We may know this, and may endure the knowledge with equanimity, even cynically enjoy and relish it ; but to have our vileness tossed in our face by another is quite another thing. The abbé was not one to be baffled and submit to the beating calmly. He was more than ever steadfastly resolved some day to conquer ; and being endowed with indomitable patience, washed the slate with plodding care in order to commence afresh.

As his craft had calculated, the marquise was too simple in her goodness and too generous to bear malice. With feelings of intense gratitude that the stony path should grow so smooth, she forgave the suppliant freely, and even gently jested as to the proposed retreat. No, no ; he must

wear his hair shirt at Gange, she said, and having been granted full absolution, must, together with her, obliterate the past. She explained that it was her intention to have masters from Blois, frankly confessing that the education of the dear ones had soared far beyond her reach. "They shall come twice a week," the marquise explained, "and I will take lessons also. It will be delightful for us all to help each other and prepare our various tasks during the other days. You, Pharamond," she added cheerily, bent on helping him to forget, "may be of the greatest service to us, for you are clever and learned in books. You shall hold the post of assistant usher and explain what we cannot understand. Leave us? Never! What would Clovis do without you? I am afraid that you will have to study

Mesmer's doctrines, so that he may not miss that woman. I am resolved that if it is essential to provide for him an affinity, that mysterious object, in the future, shall be of the other sex."

The new foundations were progressing prosperously. Pharamond had never contemplated abandoning the flesh-pots. Since the plan of an elopement with the heiress was doomed to failure through the interference of the dictatorial old maréchal, they must all be content to stop where they were, and, for the time being, dwell together. There was a lull in the political situation, so emigration might not prove necessary. Within the boundaries of France there was no safer refuge than Touraine. Rustic effervescence was subsiding. News arrived from time to time of massacres and burnings, but these were

chiefly in the south, in districts surrounding cities.

With grateful reverence and many eloquent protestations, the abbé received the olive branch and set himself with alacrity to show how exceedingly clean he was washed. He impressed on Victor and Camille the angelic attributes of their mamma, strained every nerve to tighten the bonds that had grown slack, laid stress on the fact that though the beloved governess was, of course, one of the best of women, it was necessary for their sakes to provide teachers more advanced than she. The best side of the mercurial gentleman quite glittered with snowy rectitude, and mother and children were agreed that no one could do without the abbé.

A thorn in the flesh was the chevalier. A man who, too thirsty, babbles in his

cups, is provoking ; but when he becomes maudlin and is scarcely ever sober, he is a grievous trial to his comrades. Having turned over the new leaf it was exasperating to Pharamond to be constantly reminded of the old one at inconvenient seasons by a hiccuping sot ; to be implored between vinous sobs "to make her happy." It was urgently necessary to take poor shaky Phebus in tow and treat him with strict severity. Once or twice, in disgust, he thought of getting rid of the sodden creature, and even mentioned the subject to Clovis. But the latter would not hear of his banishment.

"Where should we send him to alone ?" he asked. "He would get into trouble and disgrace us. It was you who saddled us with him, so you must help us to bear the burthen."

The abbé gave up the point without further discussion, for in dealing with the weak it is wise to let them have their way in small matters in order to get your own in large ones. Moreover, if kept under surveillance, Phebus might be improved, and it is not well to throw wilfully aside a man, however helpless, over whom we have obtained complete ascendancy.

Matters being arranged to his satisfaction so far, the astute and busy one bestirred himself about the marquis. Now that she was gone, Clovis had cause every hour, as she had foreseen, to regret Aglaé. Who so ingenious as she in disentangling knotty problems ; who so clear of head in deciphering a theorem ? Without her help, what was the use of the tub, or its precious contents ? The evenings were interminable to him without his

favourite music. The blessed violoncello reposed now in its box, for grunting on it all alone brought melancholy instead of solace to the musician. Before the cannon ball fell, neophyte and affinity had been concerting plans for removing the tub from a benighted neighbourhood to some more congenial sphere. Its blessings were wasted on rustic swine. Clovis longed to escape from the scene of his humiliation ; burned to turn his back on Lorge ; but there was a new and galling dread within, which kept him tongue-tied : a fear, that if he took too much upon himself the douche of an evil precedent would be turned on again ; that the odious old rascal in Paris would warn him to obey his wife.

If you are ill-advised enough to espouse an heiress, you are pretty sure,

sooner or later, to have her money flung in your face. Gabrielle had been so full of delicate tact with regard to the dangerous point, that Clovis had never been troubled about it until urgency had impelled de Brèze to twist the screw, and under the wrench he continued to wince and writhe. Calm and dreamy as he was, he had never overtly done anything to vex his wife—had drifted, and then been towed into troubled waters, whose turbidness, now that attention was called to them, was a matter for surprise. He had struggled in his feeble way with conscience, and, the governess assisting, had succeeded in lulling it to rest; and it was very distressing to his vanity that the sleeper should be so roughly wakened. Is it not always humiliating to be treated like a peccant school-boy?

I regret to state that the abbé,

when in conference with the marquis, adroitly added to the chafing, by covert scratches and the insertion of little pins. "To a man of spirit," he would remark, deprecatingly, "it is painful to be led by the nose; none the less so, when the holder of the tongs happens to be the one whose duty is obedience." On such occasions, Clovis would turn to his brother with puzzled wrinkleings of the brow that were piteous and yet ludicrous. "What am I to do?" he would groan. "The situation, as you say, is horrible; but I don't see a way out of the difficulty." Then the abbé would tap his shoulder and murmur, sighing, "Poor fellow. I pity you with all my being, but for all our sakes must exhort you to be civil to madame. Her wish is law to her papa. If she chose to ask the old scamp to eject

us into the road, what else could we do but go?"

Thus it will be seen that Gabrielle's sanguine expressions of gratitude were somewhat premature. The disease of an importunate love for her spouse had submitted to surgical treatment, which was an advantageous change for both ; but she guessed nothing of the Nessus shirt, that under the fine linen excoriated the tender skin of the lymphatic sensualist, or dreamed of the effect on his tissues of the abbé's little pins.

Affairs stood thus, when the marquis's *bête noire* appeared again to stir the wound in his vanity which never ceased to fester. Actually, under the spring sunshine, the dusty berline was again visible, crawling down the road with its load of dust, and M. Galland peering from the window.

Clovis shot at his wife a look of angry suspicion, but did not fail to mark by her face, that this time the apparition was unexpected. He could see plainly that if there was to be another screw turn, it was not at her instance or suggestion. So much was evident, and the hot and hasty words which rose died upon his lips. The old rascal had determined to do something disagreeable on his own account. What?

M. Galland, sphynx-like as usual, bowed to the assembled company with respectful deference; but the marquise turned faint, foreboding some fresh sorrow. The calm eyes of the solicitor rested on her with deep compassion; for she was looking so much better, that it was a grievous thing to be bearer of evil tidings. For fear of distressing his idolized child, the

maréchal had strictly forbidden her mother to alarm her in the weekly bulletins. She was not informed that the old gentleman's malady had grown on him, that he grew worse instead of better, and it came now upon her like an avalanche, that she would never see him more.

The Maréchal de Brèze was dead ; had died blessing his daughter. It was necessary for his heiress to proceed instantly to Paris, to comfort her distracted mother and attend to business of import.

The irruption of the new cannon ball affected the party of listeners differently. Gabrielle, overwhelmed with grief, retired to pray in her chamber. Oh ! Why had she not been more patient—more brave—less selfish ! She had inflicted her own troubles on the good father when he was

sick, perchance had been the innocent cause of precipitating his demise. Why not have continued the loving deceit, whereby she had veiled her wounds so long from him ?

That wicked woman had only played upon her terrors, she was now convinced of it ; would never have carried out her threats. Now that it was too late, Gabrielle perceived with abortive beatings of the breast and idle wringings of the hands, that she had acted wrongly. By playing the craven, she had killed her father ! Had she been possessed of a grain of independent courage, instead of seeking succour from without, she would have marched like a steadfast heroine straight into her husband's presence—have detailed her grievances and claimed her rights, and with her own bow and spear, have driven

the enemy away. Alas ! She was made to cling and not to fight. In her desolation she prayed long and earnestly ere tears came to her relief. Vainly Toinon upbraided her, declaring that such thoughts were morbid, whilst hastily packing for the journey.

To Clovis, the unexpected news brought ineffable relief. Just as he had learnt to believe himself saddled with a demon, who would be constantly driving spurs into his flanks. Lo ! The incubus vanished into air ! The old rascal could no longer threaten. His hand was stilled. His voice was dumb for ever. From that quarter there would be no more humiliation ; he would not be bidden to obey his wife.

The abbé was so taken aback, that his nimble mind wandered in a maze of

possibilities, ere it settled down seriously to consider the effects of the change. The protector of the marquise was gone—her only protector—for Madame la Maréchale was a colourless, somewhat weak-minded lady, who need not be considered at all. The newly-laid foundations of the house of cards were just what they should be, but as circumstances alter cases, new plans must be drawn for the structure. How true is it that the unexpected is always happening to disarrange the most elaborate schemes. The first thing was to go to Paris, there to learn what dispositions had been made by the deceased as to his property. It was highly improbable that the maréchal should have placed confidence in his unpractical consort. Was everything left to Gabrielle? Probably. The abbé was content with his survey.

By the death of de Brèze, the situation was totally altered. He, Pharamond, must by skilful management, lead the marquise to lean more and more on him. Influence must be exerted, too, over the marquis, who in sudden freedom from irksome restraint might be impelled to do something imprudent. Yes, the horizon was rosy—clouds of difficulty were rolling away. Holding in his supple fingers both the husband and the wife, and exercising due dominion over the bibulous chevalier, it would be curious if, by and by, the abbé did not attain his ends





CHAPTER XVI.

THE ABBE IS TERRIBLY PERPLEXED.

FURTHER surprises of a bewildering kind awaited our abbé in the capital, which blurred the growing clearness of his sky. The temporary tranquillity of Touraine had deceived him, for events had been passing in other parts of France of gravest import, of which hitherto he was unaware. The scum of the earth had in the general upheaval risen, as he feared, to the surface, and emitted nauseous savours.

Names new to him were in every mouth, and, the last doubts swept away,

(162)

he saw with concern for his own safety that the ship of state, guided by such agitators as he saw around, was pre-destined to disaster. Urged by curiosity, he attended the meetings of new-fangled clubs, and was amazed at the language used there — words which a couple of years ago would have jeopardized the heads of the speakers. He read the *Ami du Peuple*, a popular journal edited by one, Marat, which openly advocated regicide; and became acquainted with a forbidding person of greenish complexion and smooth aspect whom men called Robespierre. Were these ever to obtain mastery in the confusion, there were dark days in store for France, much tribulation for scions of nobility. Their majesties were still residing at the Tuilleries, but how draggled was the royal

ermine! The queen dared not to look out of a window for fear of insult. Stepping, on one occasion, into an inner court to breathe some air, the soldier on guard shook his fist at her and courteously declared how pleased he would be to have her head upon his bayonet. Anarchy and crime marched hand in hand, no longer keeping in the shadow; and the worst of all was that the movement Pharamond had been watching showed signs—as by this time the blindest of moles might perceive—of being no transient one, which interference from without might quell. A mighty nation had risen in its strength to protest against intolerable abuses, and so many villains and madmen had risen in wild crusade against things established, that no wonder it lost its senses. True, a good proportion of villains and madmen

had already gone under in the conflict, having devoured each other piecemeal ; but as these disappeared others, every bit as vile, arose to fill their places.

The long threatened collision with other nations was by this time a fact. The country was formally declared to be in danger. All the remaining property of those who had fled was seized in obedience to an edict promulgated some time since, to defray the expenses of the conflict.

The first act, and one of marked significance, dictated to the abbé by caution, was a change of garb, for in April, when religious communities were suppressed, the wearing of ecclesiastical costumes was prohibited. When religion topples, chaos shows its face.

Seeing what he saw on all sides, Pharamond might well be anxious, and

look forward with interest to the reading of de Brèze's will. Within its parchment folds lay the key of the future, for upon the conditions expressed in the document hung the fortune of the party, and he could not but feel serious misgivings with regard to inconvenient stipulations. He had been wrong in supposing that the storm could be weathered at Lorge ; of that all he beheld in Paris spoke with eloquence. Sooner or later, every noble in the land would be compelled to emigrate, or gravely risk his life. It was merely a question of how much the sooner or the later their party must join the exodus.

It was a fortunate thing that de Brèze long ago should have deposited the bulk of the money bags in Necker's bank at Geneva. The Chateau of Lorge must be

left to its fate. It really mattered little, since when provided with means, palaces will spring up at our bidding on eligible spots. It was essential to learn without delay whether he had left his fortune to the marquise absolutely, or vested it, under care of trustees, for her benefit. In the latter case she was safe, for it would be necessary to be civil to her always, which would be fatiguing; in the former, she must be cajoled to leave the country with the brothers, for some quiet place, where she could be skilfully moulded to their wishes. But what if, for some whimsy, she refused, or if there were special stipulations which would interfere with a flitting? After that artful trick of the clandestine letter there was no trusting her apparent openness. Well, well, there was no use in idle speculation.

It was a most lucky circumstance, in any case, that her only protector should be dead.

M. Galland read the will to the brothers in the absence of the heiress, for she was too much overcome by her loss to care about the provisions of the testament ; and Clovis raged inwardly the while, for the solicitor had a dubious way of glancing from one to the other of the three, which could hardly be called respectful. The effect of the reading on the auditors was curiously different. The chevalier blinked and smiled, as if he scarcely understood ; the abbé, not displeased, nodded politely from time to time, and purred out his satisfaction ; Clovis had much ado to conceal his disappointment.

The property was left to the marquise absolutely, the will being a new one, signed

a few hours before death. It was worded with extreme care, so that the entire inheritance should be at her own disposal, out of reach of Clovis as of others. This to clever Pharamond seemed a small matter, for had not the lady shown in the past that she was indifferent to dross, and would it not be an amusing bit of diplomacy to direct her as to its disposal? There were no vexatious stipulations: so far, well; and the nimble mind of the abbé began straightway to erect new card-castles for the housing of the coveted money bags. Clovis was exasperated, which was a good point that might be played on with advantage later. It was evident that his vanity was touched on the raw, for, filled as he was with deep resentment, it smouldered all the more fiercely in that he was ashamed to show it.

Was his spouse to nip his nose with the tongs for the rest of his natural life? Was he to be an obedient serf who could not touch a stiver without her express consent? At the time of his marriage he was not troubled on the subject, because the money being the maréchal's it was necessary, for the time being, to submit to his crotchety but not illiberal ways. But now that he was dead? The husband was to bend beneath the yoke, to be under the thumb of this wife of his, who had shown recently that she could assert herself, and who would, of course, now that she knew her power and disliked her spouse, use it to oppress and injure him.

As the trio walked home from M. Galland's office, the usually dreamy marquis was roused to a pitch of ire which Pharamond fanned into a flame.

“ My poor fellow,” he said, “ I bleed for you, but we must make the best of a bad job. Be civil to her, always civil, and she will let you dip into her purse.”

“ Let me, indeed!” growled Clovis, in dudgeon.

This was just where the tongs pinched most painfully. His olfactory organ still tingled with the tweaking which it received in the matter of the affinity’s expulsion, and now he was exhorted to sit down meekly and extend his nose to the torturer.

“ I suppose,” he cried, in his vexation, “ that each time I require a new pair of breeches I must beg her, on my bare knees, to sign the order.”

Splendid! The abbé was delighted, for this was quite the mental condition in which he wished to see his brother. If

the fortune had been left in the hands of the husband, as would have been proper, the tactics of the astute one would have been mapped out with simple clearness. He would have exerted his power over the marquis to obtain his share of the spoil. But with one to whom intrigue was as the breath of life, so humdrum a way of settling business could not find favour. If we would break up a bundle of sticks, we untie the string that binds them and operate separately upon each. Was it not possible finally to stop personal communication between the husband and the wife, and establish himself as go-between, availing himself of opportunities? The further he kept them apart the greater his own influence would be, and, as things were, it might soon be of the greatest importance to establish a firm

authority. To this end, therefore, he patted his fuming brother on the shoulder with affectionate familiarity.

“Come, come!” he laughed. “It is only silly children who quarrel with their bread and butter. The proceedings of the maréchal were malignant and preposterous. Curb your feelings, and bury your chagrin deep down, and never let her guess your most righteous indignation. You shall not be so far degraded if I can help it, as to have to sue in person for money. She likes and trusts me. Let me be your *homme d'affaires*, and act as mediator between you.”

Clovis was grateful for being thus saved from a humiliating position, and Gabrielle tacitly agreed to the arrangement without reflecting much upon the subject. She naturally shrank from too

frequent converse with the man whom she had ceased to love.

“What he wants for his pleasures, he can have, and welcome,” she said, with a sad smile; “but he must not be unduly extravagant. I am going to blossom out into a terrible woman of business for the sake of Victor and Camille. When they come of age they shall have cause to bless me for my thrift.”

A woman of business? That would never do. But there was no danger of it. The charming lady was not endowed with business capacities. This infant-worship of hers was rather tiresome. Would it lead to mortifying complications? *Not* if the sensitive instrument of her character was played upon with caution. To think that that never-sufficiently-to-be-execrated Aglaé should have been such a fool as to

try and strike at her through the adored cherubs—apples of the maternal eyes!

Well, that Marplot was well out of the road, and the abbé was pleased to be quit of so deceitful a coadjutor. He took the earliest opportunity to sound the marquise as to future plans. To his way of thinking it behoved the family to make quietly for Geneva, there to rejoin the money bags, and it would be well to find out, if, in her new capacity, she proposed to put down her foot. He accordingly remarked one day that Paris was a seething caldron, out of which it would be prudent to escape.

“No,” replied Gabrielle, quietly, “I have no intention of leaving at present; my place is here, and I am no poltroon. My mother wants me, and so does the queen; and there is much business to

arrange with M. Galland. The little ones are happy at Lorge with Toinon, where we will go and see them later."

"But Lorge may be burnt over our heads," objected Pharamond. "Excuse me; but you fail to grasp the situation, which is much more serious than you suppose."

"I shall certainly not leave France," returned Gabrielle, with decision. "No one will hurt us in Touraine, for we are beloved and respected, and the hearts of the people shall be our bulwarks."

This was rather a bad beginning to the newly-inaugurated régime. It was unwelcomely manifest that the foot was down. She had never mentioned her husband or referred to his possible desires. That was significant. Pshaw! she was a woman who was made to lean on others, and just now she was supported by the

queen, the family solicitor, and other meddlesome advisers, and was thereby induced to assume an independence which was foreign to her nature. So she was bent on returning to Lorge? Well and good, the sojourn must be brief. The temporary props being left behind, others would have to be supplied — by him. Pressure could be brought to bear within the walls of the grim chateau, and so soon as it should be urgent to flit, why, then there should be a flitting. For the present she was mistress of the situation, and till a change could be brought about, must have her way unchallenged.

As for Clovis, with much spare time upon his hands, his idle hours were spent in brooding and regret, and the yearning that besets humanity to have things other than they are. He was both fascinated

and disgusted by the scenes that passed around him, episodes which served to increase the peevishness due to private worries.

He was haunted by the idea that if Gabrielle had refrained from writing that letter, the maréchal would not have so disposed his property as to secure it against his son-in-law. But that piece of sly impertinence on the part of the lady who bore his name had put everything agog. But for her all apprehensions might ere this have been removed. He would have been independent ; have betaken himself and the magic tub to some other land under the guidance of the dear affinity ; have escaped from the turmoil of politics, the noisy babble of miscreants and cut-throats ; be enjoying in peace the applause and serenity which go with success in

science. Instead of that, here was he, the Marquis de Gange, kicking his heels in a capital which resembled in its wild proceedings the mental phantasmagoria that follows indigestion, deprived even of the consoling presence of her who knew how to comfort him.

Pharamond was all very well in his way, always obliging and cheery, but somehow or other his sweetness left a taste in the mouth that was bitter, even acrid. How this should be Clovis was at a loss to comprehend, for there was no doubt that the abbé was sincerely sorry for his brother's woeful plight, and did all that in him lay to prune the thorns that pricked him. As Clovis meditated, topics were ever cropping up which he longed to discuss with the governess ; but, alas, alas ! thanks to the insane jealousy of a most

annoying wife, the charmer was gone—her place knew her no more !

To brood over the halcyon days which are gone by is conducive to snappishness, and, after a chewing of the cud, to chronic sullenness and gnawing discontent. Sometimes the marquis would strive to rouse himself from dismal reverie, and force himself to take interest in what was passing ; but the contemplation thereof only led to further disapproval, for he found himself in company that revolted him. To think that he, a noble of high rank, should find himself cheek by jowl with the low, dirty, foul-mouthed scribbler, whose name was Marat ! People's friend, forsooth ! If a wolf could write a journal, the brute could not raven more thirstily for blood. Blood—not in drops from a single breast, nor even in a river from the

slaughter of families. He howled for the crimson liquor in the profusion of an ocean from the instinctive love of it which impels the tiger to rend his mangled victim after his hunger is appeased. Then to have to be civil to that dandified Robespierre, whom instinct whispered was one of the coming men—one whose talents were insignificant and oratory wretched, but who plodded ahead to his goal with a passionless undeviating pitiless perseverance that was appalling; one who boasted with apathetic cruelty that to gain a point the immolation of a generation was as nothing; who was already clamouring for the sacrifice of the royal family, and of all who were tainted with nobility.

To visit the palace was to be distracted with indignant pity. Though the son of St. Louis still ate off silver plate, the most

elaborate precautions were taken to secure him against poison. The wine he drank, the food he ate, was introduced secretly by devoted friends. Not a scrap passed his lips that was supplied from the royal kitchens. Things had gone so far that there was no safety—as the hapless king had realized on the eve of the Varennes disaster—but in flight. His friends in Paris could be of little service, for he was as close a prisoner in the gilded Tuileries as the felon in his cell—in a worse plight than the convicted assassin in his jail, whom the rabble were forbidden to persecute.

Clovis could perceive as clearly now as Pharamond that so acute a situation could not last. This was a state of crisis which should have nearly attained its apogee, and which promised to result in catastrophe.

And here was the Gange family lingering on in the most undesirable manner instead of making itself scarce, and skipping out of danger. As we know, Clovis was not too brave, and preferred scientific to military triumphs. If other nobles viewed the situation from a long way off, why should not he also ? What was it to him that the continued outpouring of landholders had unhinged the public mind, and that the exodus of those who should have rallied round their monarch was indeed the greatest cause of the miseries that loomed ahead ? By deserting their native land at the most critical period of its history, the French nobility cast a stain on their order, which may never be wiped out. At this time, no less than a hundred thousand of the most influential class had turned their backs upon their country !

The marquis exhorted and implored his brother to speak to Gabrielle, to beg her to be sensible and go, before it was too late. With perfect truth (for once) Pharamond declared that he had done his best—that Gabrielle was obstinate and declined to budge—adding, with a conciliatory smile, that Clovis must practise the unruffled calm that springs from a tranquil mind; that when the new-blown prerogative of managing people was more familiar to the heiress, she would be less headstrong, more considerate.

“It was too bad,” groaned Clovis, who really was growing frightened. The details of the inheritance settled, what was to detain a party of provincials, who no longer had business in the dangerous proximity of the whirlpool? If the heritage had been left in a proper manner, all

would have been well; for there would be nothing more natural than for the head of the family to issue peremptory and dignified orders for immediate departure. Even Gabrielle, who steadfastly declined to be of the elect, ought—by reason of her gentle birth—to have preferred the philanthropic society of an adept and the virtues of a magic tub at a safe distance, to the chance of rubbing shoulders with a Marat or a Robespierre, or enduring blue-stocking lectures from an upstart Madame Roland. Though young and handsome, that person was a political pen-woman — horrid precedent ! But the contrariness of the feminine nature is proverbial. As was to be expected, the heiress was gloating over the shame of those she held in leash, and refused to leave the hurly-burly just to annoy her husband.

As to this Pharamond fully agreed with Clovis. There was nothing to be gained but possible mishaps by lingering in Paris; and he was the more anxious to be off that he found himself a nonentity there. The fields he burned to cultivate were lying fallow. His house of cards was making no progress; he seemed actually to be losing ground. The abbé was a busy bee whose time was being wasted.

Had not Gabrielle and Clovis become hopelessly estranged she might have confided to him her deep sorrow for the queen, and her unflinching determination to remain beside her, so long as she could be of use. In better days, the queen had been her benefactress, and she loved her as all did who knew her well.

But days of confidence were over now,

never to be recalled. The seasons revolved, and spring came round again to find the De Ganges still in Paris.

It is only fair to say that Clovis was sorry for the position of their majesties ; but being of lymphatic temperament he had decided long ago that disagreeable things which could not be helped, and which did not injure himself, were promptly to be set aside.

Ill-starred Marie Antoinette ! Is it to underline the fact of mundane injustice that the innocent are so often scapegoats for the black sheep ? There was no abomination, however monstrous, of which the mob, maddened by professional agitators, did not believe her to be capable. Murder, adultery, theft.

She sometimes mournfully reminded Gabrielle of the evening—it must have

been a thousand years ago—when they had discussed their horoscopes. “The iron grave-clothes, as was foretold, are slowly wrapping me,” she said, “to stifle my breath and crush my bones. I hope and believe, dear Gabrielle, that your prophet lied, for you are content and well. Happiness, we all are bound to learn does not exist. That will perhaps appear as a fresh and welcome acquaintance at some later stage of the long journey. You are well, my dear, and I am glad, but I may not keep you, for here we are under the ban. I would not have the faithful few to share the fate which daily approaches nearer.”

Gabrielle sighed, but kept her counsel, for why should she inflict her own sorrows on one so sorely stricken? Content? No. Not even that—much less happy.

She who needed sympathy and support so much that without them she felt her fibres paralysed, had come to know that all the battles of our inner life must be fought out alone, hand to hand, in solitude, and that no friend, not even the dearest, can help us in the conflict. She had learned that much during hours of self-communing at Lorge, and the discovery dismayed her. In the next world, the Christians say there is no marrying or giving in marriage. Each soul is a single unit, the bonds of life-chains shattered. It is so even in this life, though many see it not; when the real tussle comes, the spirit stands unaided, deprived of succour from without, to triumph or to fall alone.

It was her anxious wish to stay beside the queen and cheer her, and by so doing cheer herself. To be certain that some

one longed for her advent, and that her appearance in a doorway was like the glinting of a welcome sunbeam, was a novel and refreshing sensation after the gruesome experiences of Lorge. There was no need to trouble about the prodigies, seeing that they were enjoying the best of air under surveillance of Toinon and her betrothed. The old mother, who sadly missed the perennial scoldings of the irascible defunct, also needed her presence, for was she not more helpless than her child ? Gabrielle, counselled by M. Galland, had settled that the old lady was to move to a small house of modest aspect in the suburbs, where she could vegetate unharmed by revolutionary turbulence, and arranged with the family solicitor to keep a watchful eye on her.

The marquise had a variety of reasons,

then, for desiring to remain in the capital.

Idleness brings out the bad points of most people; and both Clovis and Pharamond were chafing. The latter, having nothing else to do, studied his brother carefully, and the proceeding increased his disquietude. Clovis fretted, and fumed, and yawned, and wished himself away, listening with eagerness to the abbé's insidious inuendoes, then growling and muttering to himself. He had something on his mind which he was keeping back. It was not well that he should keep anything from the abbé, so the son of the Church, with appropriate little jests anent confession, set himself to expose the secret. It was as instinct bade him fear. Clovis was hankering after the absent affinity.

Pharamond had had cause to suspect

that since the advent of Mademoiselle Brunelle his own power had been permanently weakened. As he had told Gabrielle, to obtain complete mastery over this wavering specimen of fleshliness it was necessary that the leading-rein should be held by a woman ; and—without fault of his—the abbé chanced to be a man.

The marquis had not been aware of the delights of feminine companionship till the arrival of the enchanting governess, and Pharamond understood with reluctance now that although the subject had been tabooed, Clovis yet pined for his affinity. He remembered the parting words of Aglaé at the moment of her banishment. “In the solitude of the country,” she had said, “the neophyte would miss her.” The capital under its present aspect was as lonely to him, for

he had always been more or less of a recluse, and most of his town friends had joined the army of emigrants.

To avoid contact with the scum, and to save appearances in the matter of compulsory attendance on his wife, he had taken up his studies with ardour in the capital, and missed his late comrade each day more and more. As his lips unclosed, he poured forth his confession to the churchman; Pharamond reflected with perturbation that if the temple were left long without its tenant, a new one might crawl in and occupy. What was to prevent this flabby Clovis, since he felt the void so much, from seeking another adept, even from applying to Mesmer for just such another siren as the last? And if he did, what of the abbé and his plans? Though not so docile as could be wished, and

given to casual deceit, it was possible for the abbé and the governess to work together smoothly enough. That much had been proven. Supposing that, taking the bull by the horns, he were cunningly to bring about her re-introduction into the *ménage*, would she be grateful, and, singing *peccavi*, promise to behave better in future? Gratitude is so scarce a commodity! And by what artifice could she be introduced again without raising a whirlwind of remonstrance? On the other hand, if Clovis were allowed to find another leader, the new affinity might eschew an alliance with the abbé, even deliberately work for his suppression. How complicated the game! How difficult were his cards to play! Was it safe to leave the ball to roll, or must it be checked in mid career? How would the marquise behave

deprived of parental support, at sight of the apparition of her rival? These were knotty problems, and another false move might mean irremediable discomfiture. Impossible as it was to see far ahead, it was necessary to feel step by step like a blind man groping. How delicate an operation to re-introduce the massive form of the offender! On what plea, since after what had passed she could not assume the attributes of teacher? Move the fragments of his puzzle as he would, they declined to fit together, and the abbé ground his teeth with fury and confessed that for the moment he was nonplussed.

If only the marquise could be induced to return home quickly, remove herself from the influence of supporters. Would it be well to have a fictitious message sent announcing the illness of the darlings? A

scrap of paper a few inches square would send her posting back to Lorge at lightning speed ; but then discovering that she was fooled, suspicion would arise, alert. Could Clovis be persuaded to go home without her ? In that case his brothers must accompany him, lest, left to his devices, he should do something regrettable ; and it was of equal importance to keep an eye on wife as well as husband.

Turning the subject over and over with infinite care, the abbé admitted with an impatient sigh that for the time being he was powerless, and that the ball must be allowed to roll. Meanwhile it would be advisable not to lose touch of the governess, lest some day, when wanted, she should turn rusty and accuse him of neglect. He accordingly sat down and wrote a long and entertaining letter full

of sly quip and graphic description, ending with the assurance that the marquis did not forget, and that the humble scribe was her slave.

This precaution taken, he settled himself down to drift with hands before him: nor had he long to wait to perceive the direction of the current.

It was the twentieth of June. The day was balmy, and the windows open. The queen sat in a low *causeuse* in her tiny library relating to the Marquise de Gange the ominous occurrences of the morning. Paris was a penful of sheep now distracted by too many shepherds—a weathercock its most fitting symbol. What was happening every day would be laughable but for the lurid cloud above with its blood-red lining, and the low rumbling of thunder, each hour more dis-

tinct. The Assembly whose mission was to guide the nation was no better than a den of noxious animals, each bent on biting his neighbour. The president had committed the grievous error of opening the flood-gates to the waters. The sacred precincts over which he ruled were thrown open to a mob of thirty thousand scoundrels who, their imaginations inflamed by novelty and drunken with success, licked their foul lips and prepared for further outrage. Women danced like Mœnads, waving a pike in one hand and an olive-branch in the other—symbols of peace and war. From a chorus of brawny throats rolled the familiar strains of *Ça Ira*. The unkempt porters of the markets, the cadaverous workers from the cellars of St. Antoine; a weak-limbed squad, a sturdy crew of

ruffians, equally bent on mischief, waved rude bits of jagged iron bound to the ends of bludgeons. There was no end to the muster. Women possessed of the devil *Hysteria*—men maddened and excited by the women. More men—more women—women—men. What did they want? What was the object of the saturnalia in the sacred precincts of the Assembly? Ragged breeches were held up with a yell of “*Vive les sans culottes!*” Some one flourished a pike aloft on which was transfixed the bleeding heart of a calf. Through the drip the scrawled description could be deciphered—“This is the heart of an aristocrat!”

“If the accepted authorities were to be bearded thus, what next?” suggested Marie Antoinette. “We are marching

straight downwards to our doom. We know it, and being blameless, look to the end with thankfulness. But when we are sacrificed — what then — afterwards. *Après ?*"

When Gabrielle strove to persuade her benefactress that she saw things *en noir* the latter gave her haughty head a toss. "Conflict with the inevitable is not always an absurd mockery, for self-respect, when we are innocent, insists on battle to the death."

As she spoke a low rumble, increasing each second in volume which seemed an echo of what she described as having dismayed the Assembly a few hours since, caused the ladies to look at each other in alarm. What was that ominous sound? Almost before they had time to realize that it meant anguish and woe treading on

each other's heels—it had increased to a deafening roar.

“They have burst into the gardens. Where are the little ones?” cried Gabrielle, thinking of her own cherubs, happily far away. “I will fetch them. Their Royal Highnesses are in the next room, reading.”

She sped away, and returning with the royal children presently, beheld her mistress leaning against the casement frame, stone white.

“Hist!” she said, her voice scarce audible above the noise. “The wretches have invaded the palace—do they intend to fire it? Amid yonder sea of pikes and staves there is a cannon which they are dragging up the stairs. What for—for me? Into what a pandemonium were we born!”

The uproar was like the lashing of an angry sea. The frightened women could hear the grinding and creaking of the heavy gun as with volleys of cries and curses it was lifted to the grand landing. “Unbar the door or we will blow it down,” some one shouted, in rough accents—then followed a thunderous battering of pikes, the crushing and rending of panels and then—silence.

“They will kill him. They will kill him! Why am I not by his side?” murmured Marie Antoinette, writhing her hands together.

“I am here—what would you?” a steady voice said, cheerfully, rising above the hubbub not far away.

“Vive la nation!” roared the rabble.

“Yes. Vive la nation. I am its best friend,” replied the king.

Then there was a diversion. The trembling listeners were startled by a new roar of groans and hooting. "There she is—the curse of France. The Austrian! The Austrian! Down with her!"

"My God!" muttered the queen. "It must be Elizabeth whom they mistake for me! My place is with them. Is a child of Maria Theresa to play the cur? Why am I skulking here?"

"Madame! They will tear you in pieces!" implored Gabrielle, clinging to her skirts.

"So be it," returned the queen proudly, and drawing herself up to her imperial height, she opened the door with steady hand and went forth with her two children. Unrecognized, she penetrated as far as the council chamber where a group of Grenadiers hastily surrounded

and pushed her into the embrasure of a window which they barricaded with a table. For the present, to attempt to reach the king was hopeless. The palace was flooded with a ragged rout, who, in intervals of yelling pocketed such portable property as was handy. They were covered with dirt and blood, and, for the most part, wore the red cap recently introduced by Collot d'Herbois as the orthodox symbol of the free:

Meanwhile a messenger had rushed to the Assembly to announce the danger of the palace, and a number of deputies hastened thither with all speed, to stay the wreckers and prevent a tragedy. The mob, drunk with too potent a dose of liberty, had committed a deplorable outrage, and were on the threshold of a great crime without definite purpose. Exhorted

to sobriety, upbraided for excesses which stained the holy cause in the face of Europe, the rabblement sulkily withdrew, gnashing their teeth and snarling with gestures of menace, as they filed past the queen; and she watched them go in gloomy silence, with a heart that welled with horror and eyes that swam in tears.

For the moment peril was averted, the palace safe; but who might tell when the unreasoning flood, lashed by the agitators into foam, would, in caprice, flow back and drown its inmates? General indignation prevailed among all grades of the better classes.] Though to the new way of thinking kings and queens might be objects of dislike, yet, so long as they existed, it was not fair that at any moment their privacy should be invaded by the unwashed, their furniture broken, their children terrified.

The Assembly was ashamed. The partisans of the court were unwise enough to bluster. Rumours were abroad that, in consequence of the outrage, the royal servants were to be armed ; that the Swiss Guard would be ordered to fire upon the first sans-culotte who ventured within shot. So far was this from the truth that his majesty had determined to dismiss from about his person those untrustworthy friends, who, without possessing the power to save, had so often compromised him. The queen, too, was firmly resolved that she would not have upon her head the blood of those who were not directly in her service. Gently, but without wavering, she bade adieu, amongst others, to the Marquise de Gange, who begged hard for permission to remain.

“ No,” said Marie Antoinette, gloomily,

“you have duties of your own from which I must no longer keep you. Heaven bless you, my dear friend. To such calumnies as may reach your ears you will give no credence, but will pray for an unhappy woman who has not deserved her fate. Give me your thoughts and prayers, for we shall meet no more on earth.”

Her forebodings were but too soon realized. Only seven weeks later the Palace of the Tuilleries was stormed, and the devoted guards massacred under circumstances of peculiar atrocity. Soon afterwards the royal family were removed to the Temple, whence, in the course of a long drawn martyrdom, the unfortunate queen was transferred to a squalid hole in the Conciergerie on her rough road to the scaffold and release.



CHAPTER XVII.

GABRIELLE HAS AN IDEA.

Loth as she was to leave her benefactress in so critical a plight, there was no denying that the Marquise de Gange was an incumbrance in the royal dwelling ; yet another helpless female for the men to protect ; and that there were duties with regard to others, that demanded the attention of the heiress.

Clovis had valid reason for his impatience to be off. The prisons were opening their maws to swallow the blue-blooded, who tumbled in by shoals on

frivolous and ridiculous charges. Paris was becoming so disagreeably warm, that self-preservation bade all and sundry to depart unless tied by special reasons. Now, as the abbé pointed out (who grew almost as impatient as his brother, in his enforced idleness), there was nothing whatever to detain the provincials from returning to their chateau, since the queen had dismissed the marquise.

Gabrielle agreed that the time was come for a journey, and even made an attempt to induce the aged maréchale to join the party. It would be nice to have her mother with her, and perhaps the suburban residence might be fraught with unknown drawbacks. But at the suggestion, the old lady lifted up her voice in such querulous screechings that her daughter was silenced.

"You should know, but for your innate selfishness," complained the old dame, "that I can't bear the place. Its crepuscular corridors and frowning front give me the shivers. I wonder you can endure it yourself, but you always were so peculiar and inconsiderate. I will visit you for a week or so some day, if I pluck up courage; but, live there? The family vault with a pile of coffins for furniture, would be more cheerful as a dwelling-place."

Then Gabrielle's mind went through a curious and unexpected phase. The queen's reference to their horoscopes had set the marquise thinking. The prophecy regarding her majesty was being fulfilled, slowly but surely, to the letter. A friend informed her with grief and lamentations, that Louise de Savoye, Princesse de

Lamballe, had been seized and confined at La Force. At this moment, the least secure refuges in France were the prisons, for the blood-drunken populace had a way of making raids upon the jails, and maltreating incarcerated aristos, out of pure devilry. First, Her Majesty; then Madame de Lamballe. Who was she, Marquise de Gange, that she should hope to escape her doom? She was, like the others, predestined to misfortune. True. She had suffered deeply already, and Heaven had relented for awhile; but there was nothing to justify her in face of the prophecy, in supposing that it was more than a respite. Try to grapple with it as she would, Gabrielle, as the time for moving approached, was oppressed by a growing presentiment of ill. From what quarter it was to come she could not guess,

but it was her bounden duty to take such precautions as were possible. Were the darlings to be stricken down and die? Or was the impending misfortune to consist in the sacking of the chateau? It was impossible to foresee and avert the trouble. In contrast to the storm that had blown over, the family outlook was fair enough. Though the domestic sky was cloudflecked, there was no specially black bank of vapour striding up the vault. Clovis was bearish and ill-humoured. That was nothing new. The abbé was all smiles and benevolence, his leisure much occupied in a laudable and Christian endeavour to break the chevalier of tippling. Toinon wrote that, summoned to Blois by his party, Jean Boulot was gone for awhile, and for her part she rejoiced at the riddance, for was it not

too bad that he should prefer his vulgar noisy Jacobin clubs and fustian nonsense to the charming society of his betrothed?

Strive as she would to argue with and laugh at herself, Gabrielle could not shake off her gloom. The gamekeeper—who had saved her life—was gone away to Blois, and Toinon hoped that he would stop there? Why should she feel as if a staunch and trusty friend had left her side? The chatelaine had every right to feel angry that a paid servant should throw up his place with such scant ceremony, and yet was not the abruptness of the act strictly in tune with the man's independent principles and the spirit of the time?

He was a rough, honest, warm-hearted, wrong-headed fellow, with whom Toinon was justly annoyed in that she had failed to reform his ways. All this was true

enough, but Gabrielle could not shake off a sense of loneliness, of vague uneasy dread, a conviction of impending calamity ; and suddenly something whispered that before leaving Paris it would be well to execute a testament.

History is full of strange presentiments which come like warnings, but which have the peculiar property of defeating themselves ; for they exercise sometimes a fatal fascination akin to that of the snake over the bird, which paralyses the victim's efforts to escape the threatened peril.

Trying to argue down her fears, she made it the more evident to herself that whatever came of it, duty pointed in the direction of Lorge. The grim chateau was her own now ; the fields were her own fields ; the peasants her own vassals. In the interests of the darlings she would

be very energetic, learn to farm, improve the property, and draw the bonds closer than heretofore between mistress and tenants. But what if the clever abbé's prognostications were to be realized, and the flames which she had seen burning so fiercely in Paris, were indeed to spread dismay and ruin even to remote Touraine ? Was he right in the advice which she had resented so warmly—the unwelcome advice to be content with the money-bags at Geneva, and abandon the chateau to the wreckers ? No. She had always disapproved the craven conduct of the fugitives. It was not in the nature of things for the present cataclysm to go on for ever. Temporary insanity would give way to reason ; the mob, glutted by impunity and gorged by excess, would calm down again, and those who had had

presence of mind to hold their own while passively bowing before the storm would reap the reward of their bravery.

The chatelaine knew herself to be a favourite with the people and that her presence at the chateau would go far in the event of a revolutionary wave, to save it from destruction. She could not believe that the shadow she felt approaching could come from that quarter. Whence then? It was probably a bugaboo, born of nervousness, resulting from sympathy with the desperate condition of the queen. Dismissed by Marie Antoinette, her place was at Lorge on the estates, and since flesh is grass, it was only right to make a will.

While revolving these things, Gabrielle's attention was naturally turned upon her husband. It was odd that he should resent so deeply her one act of

independence. We know that what the constitutionally weak resent the most, is being openly convicted of their weakness. Could that humiliating quarter of an hour with the family solicitor have left so deep an impression on his easy-going soul? and, while her repulsed affection had faded into indifference, was his unconcern growing into positive aversion? It occurred to her now for the first time, as singular that when he wanted money of late the abbé had always been the spokesman. Did he feel his dependent position so acutely that he could not bring himself to mention the sordid subject, or was it that he had come to dislike his wife so much, that he could not bring himself to speak to her at all? She resolved to open her mind to the abbé about it, for Clovis must be infatuated and purblind indeed, not to feel assured that,

though she was resolved to carry out her father's wishes and keep a firm hold of the purse strings, they would not be drawn too tight.

The abbé's thin features relaxed into a whimsical smile, and he slyly nodded, as with some stammering and much circumlocution she exposed her suspicions to him. Was it, or not, abominably wicked of her to have such suspicions at all? How girlish and how lovely she looked in her blushing confusion, as she enlarged on the unsavoury topic, excusing herself for harbouring such thoughts.

“ You dear guileless dove of a Gabrielle ! ” he laughed. “ Yet not so simple as you seem, for you have guessed aright. Alack, yes ! Unpardonably sensitive as he may appear to you, your little escapade—you will allow me to call it an escapade ?—

cut him so completely to the quick that he has never recovered it, but crouches down and winces still like a well-whipped hound, dreading another scourging. You deem yourself proud? Learn that an honest man's pride is of more delicate texture than a woman's. And it *is* hard, you know, for a proud man to be placed before witnesses in so equivocal a position as that in which you placed your husband."

The position in which *she* had placed *him*? What of the intolerable one in which *he* had chosen to place *her*? Men always start with the absurd premise that they must be in the right. Gabrielle was deeply offended that one on whom she had vainly squandered all the treasures of her love could think this meanly—read her so amiss!

Tears of mortification due to insulted womanhood were in her eyes, and as he marked the colour, like that of an opening moss rose, that flooded plastic neck and shell-like ear, the blood of Pharamond throbbed so fiercely that he had much ado to maintain his impassible demeanour.

“ Since you forgave me, I take Heaven to witness,” he purred, bending as near to her as he dared, “ that I have striven to heal your differences.”

“ Differences ? There need be none ; my love for him is dead,” Gabrielle remarked slowly, so absorbed in the contemplation of shattered Penates as to pass unheeded the gleam of triumph on the face that was so near her shoulder. “ You may tell him, if you like, that I shall not behave ill to him, because he has outraged me. A fair allowance shall be regularly

paid to him, or to you if he prefers it. Monsieur Galland is coming here this afternoon about my testament, and the arrangement shall be carried out at once." Then after a gloomy pause, she added with a sigh, "To think he could ever suppose that I should want him to ask me favours!"

So her unrequited and too persistent love had perished of starvation! It was dead—quite, quite dead, at last! With its last struggle how great a barrier was swept away, and how much better was the chance for one who had obstinately persevered!

Excellent! The empty shell was ready for the hermit crab! Pharamond could see ultimate triumph, within measurable distance, and after that a ripe revenge. A fair allowance regularly paid? Gilded, degrading slavery! Clovis would repudiate

the plan ; refuse to have anything to do with it.

But what was this about a will ?

“ M. Galland—about your will, this afternoon ? ” the abbé echoed with raised brows. “ On whose advice are you acting ? I declare you are marvellously changed, every inch a woman of business. Pooh, pooh ! Is there not ample time ? For a beautiful young creature like yourself to prate of such grisly things seems like an untimely invitation to the worms.”

“ Little I care for life, God knows ! ” sighed Gabrielle, wearily, “ were it not for——”

“ Yes, yes, I know—the cherubs. About this will. It takes me by surprise, and you have deigned to trust me. Your pardon if I seem importunate. I scarcely dare to ask, and yet——”

“What its conditions are to be? There need be no secret as to that, since my mind is quite made up. I intend to leave my dear father’s fortune to my mother, in trust for Victor and Camille?”

Here was a sledge-hammer blow, full on the skull from behind. For an instant Pharamond was paralysed, then his nimble brain took in at a glance all the facets of this new and unpalatable situation. Who could have put into her shapely head so inconvenient an idea as this? Good heavens! If this project were not nipped in the bud, averted somehow, the future position of the three brothers promised to be a worse one even than in the days of the maréchal! What the abbé had himself looked upon as a scarcely possible contingency, and had held up to the marquis as a mere red rag to inflame his feelings

withal against his wife, might at any moment become an actual and horrible fact. At this rate the marquis and his brothers were not to be provided for at all ; were in the event of this woman's death to be pitched out like so much lumber ! And she had the brazen presumption to expatiate on their lot to their faces. A gush of ungovernable rage, bubbled into the abbé's brain, an unreasoning whirl, which he vainly endeavoured to master, as he strode up and down the room.

“ Clovis is to be made a laughing stock to suit your malice ! ” he exclaimed hotly, as he turned on the astonished marquise. “ He counts for nothing, although your lawful husband. No wonder if you have earned his hate as well as mine, since you are resolved to pour insult upon insult.”

“ Of course, he will have his allowance

secured until his death," Gabrielle explained, with a red spot of annoyance on either cheek.

"Pah! Allowance! Allowance! A pittance for a schoolboy, which he will fling back into your face. If he takes my advice, he will toss your paltry allowance in your lap, since you treat him like a baby! A dole of charity to a beggar!"

The marquise sat dumb with hands before her, petrified, for this man would fain persuade her that she was a monster of iniquity, on the threshold of a stupendous crime, and yet she knew that her motives were of the purest.

He continued, biting his nails in his agitation, addressing his words half to himself and half to her.

"Women's horizon is so circumscribed, her stream of thought so narrow, that if left

alone she rarely avoids being ungenerous. Engrossed by trivialities how can it be otherwise? Sly, too, and double-faced. So this is your sublime forgiveness, in which I was fool enough to trust! A trap! A trick! You were but biding your time, till you could injure me by maltreatment of my brother. My first duty is to him, and I tell you plainly, that never with my consent will he accept your ignoble terms."

Gabrielle made no answer but sat dumb.

"Eh, bien, madame," he cried, suddenly wheeling round and standing in front of her, his thin lips curled into a snarl. "The result of your insensate acts be on your head. Mark that the fault is yours if, after all my efforts to annihilate the past, you force me to be your enemy.

Here below we must be judged by acts, madame, not by sugared words that mean nothing. Why compel me to war when I would fain bring peace? If you execute so iniquitous an instrument as you propose, you will have made thereby three implacable enemies; and a woman without friends should think twice before making one. Your husband never wronged you with that governess, you foolish girl; you were racked by your own silly phantom jealousy. If you must have revenge, wreak it upon me, whose only fault was loving you too much. No need to start. Cards down! Why should I deny that I loved you? The more fool I! But as your love for him has been crushed out, so, too, has mine for you, as to your sorrow you will learn."

His envenomed words snapped out

like the clicks of a matchlock, and the old dismay gathered round the heart of the marquise with a chill of exceeding desolation. She had been taken in. His seeming recovery of his better self was but a sham, his fawning courtesy a grimace, his suave kindness a mockery, his effusive benevolence a snare. To one so simply truthful as Gabrielle, such calculating duplicity was diabolical. He had dropped his vizard and shown his real face, and as she shudderingly surveyed it, she had gauged something of the malice of which this foe was capable. Returned to Lorge, was peace to be denied? Since cajolery and threats had not availed to win her, did he think to bend her to his will by force? Though he declared he hated her, there was that on his white vindictive face that she had learned to read too well.

She would go straight to her husband, tell him the whole truth, and claim protection. But what then of the disposal of her property, which she felt it her duty to make? Ought she, taking a high line, to threaten to withdraw the allowance, act for herself as the good father had done on her behalf? But, ah me, how changed things were since then, so brief a while ago! Her husband already hated her—there was a ring of sincerity in the voice of Pharamond as he informed her that it was so, and she knew well, in case of a tussle, into which scale the latter would throw all his weight. Doubtless, Clovis wished her dead; alone at Lorge, might even—yet no, much as he might wish to be quit of her, his courage would surely fail when the pinch came.

In carrying out her project she would

be acting rightly, of that she was now more than ever convinced ; but locked up with the brethren at Lorge, would not her own courage fail ? Perhaps it would be safer to remain in the Paris whirlpool. But what of the children then, and what of the prisons that filled so rapidly ? Behind the bars and bolts of La Force or the Abbaye, of what service could she be to them ? Leave the country she would not, stay in the capital she dared not. Moreover, in so turbulent a time her place was among her people in her distant citadel of Lorge.

All that was fine in theory, yet her heart whispered grave doubts as to her tenacity of purpose in carrying out to the end the fight so boldly planned. Alas, did she not know too well that standing alone and unsupported, with no succour

within hail, she would go down at the shock of the first lance? Should she parley, even surrender now, at once—unveil her feebleness and implore pity? Promise to abandon the project which raised such ire and stirred the lees of the worst passions, trust the future of her children to their father's paternal instincts? No; one of the lessons taught by the abbé was that Clovis was born to be led. Happily that woman had been expelled, but rescued from her baleful control, he would fall under that of somebody else, and circumstanced as they were, who should that other be but the vindictive Pharamond? Of course, at Lorge, the marquis would sink completely under the abbé's sway; and with him for master, much chance would Victor and Camille have of justice in the event of their mother's death.

Come what might to her, they should be guarded. Taking her courage in both hands and clinging firmly to it, she must pray for strength to bear all, doing what was best for the little ones. The best security against the greed and malevolence of Pharamond would be to place the fortune out of reach.

As these considerations flitted across the mind of the harassed marquise, she took comfort in the thought that the arch-foe should have exposed himself as he was before the party had started from Paris. Further precautions should be devised by a mother's ingenuity such as should reduce to harmlessness, in the event of disaster to herself, the abbé's strongest batteries.

Meanwhile, Pharamond mopped his face with a laced kerchief, blaming himself

for precipitation as he paced nervously up and down. That he, skilful fowler of artless birds, should have been betrayed by sudden passion and disappointment into exhibiting his person to this flutterer! But then the blow had been so swift and heavy that there was some excuse for reeling under the shock. It was vexatious to have been taken off his guard. Further duplicity was useless now, for the present, at least, for she was fully informed as to his sentiments with regard to the obnoxious testament. She had beheld a glimpse of his real countenance, which was a pity, for burrowing underground was the favourite pastime of our abbé. It was a mercy, considering all things, that the obdurate and recalcitrant lady had resolved on returning to Lorge. Beyond the frontier, countenanced by friends and

acquaintances, she would doubtless have proved dreadfully obstreperous. Yes, decidedly it was best to depart forthwith for the chateau. It was a fortunate thing, too, that during the lengthy and tedious sojourn in the metropolis, Clovis should have abstained from falling into the clutches of some new and antagonistic affinity.

And this turned the current of his meditations into another channel. It would have to be war now at Lorge, deliberate and serious war for the averting of a threatened calamity; a campaign consisting of feints, and ambuscades, and forced night marches requiring swiftness of resolve and unerring execution. As to submitting to such a testament, it was out of the question. The campaign might prove a desperate and bloody one, for maternity at bay fights hard.

If she signed the proposed document—and just now she looked very resolute—it would have, somehow or another, to be cancelled; a ticklish job even for so astute a diplomatist as our abbé. Would it be prudent to descend alone into the arena, or must an ally be found? But for Clovis's tergiversation, Pharamond felt fully capable of carrying a battle to successful issue, but he knew better than to deceive himself with regard to the shifty marquis, and caution whispered that he dared not work alone. His mere male influence might lead the horse to the water, but could not make him drink. You may bend a bow with impunity to a certain point, beyond which it will snap unless strengthened. Desperate emergencies call for desperate remedies, and Clovis' was one to shrink and run away

in the face of anything desperate. How difficult to guide clear of obstacles is a shying horse!

Although a thousand pities, it was plain to Pharamond that what might have to be done could not be accomplished alone ; that combined forces would be required to arrive at a given result, to reach a goal which he gropingly saw looming.

What could Gabrielle be pondering over so deeply, as with absent gaze she looked out of the window ? Perhaps, alarmed, she was repenting, was preparing at the first glimpse of the enemy's line of battle to withdraw from the conflict. Her attitude was full of hesitation ; here was a crumb of comfort. It was wondrous that she should have been able, so far, to subdue her nature as to speak out so boldly as she had dared to do just now. A little

solitary reflection might produce a salutary effect. In a duel of wits, when your foe begins to hesitate, leave him to his thoughts, and ten to one he will give way.

The abbé roused himself from reverie ; coughed to draw attention, and bowed with a measure of respect, nicely tempered with menace. Then, smilingly remarking that it would be regrettable if his dear sister-in-law did not reconsider her iniquitous plans, he took himself out of the apartment for the purpose of informing Clovis.

Left alone, Gabrielle, as Pharamond had seen, was much perturbed by the difficulties of the task she had set herself, but when she remembered his wicked face, a courage, born of despair, came to her aid, and she resolved to take up the cudgels.

As she mechanically arranged, with trembling fingers, her silken hood and mantle, she prayed fervently for strength, and called on heaven for protection.

Without a moment's waiting she would go to M. Galland. The solicitor had arranged to call during the afternoon, but she felt assured that if she were to wait till then, she would think, and think, and think, till courage ebbed away. Swiftly descending the stairs unseen by the abbé, who was busily unfolding his budget for the horrified behoof of his more than ever exasperated brother, she hailed a hackney chair, and had herself carried to the lawyer's.

Being a person of eminent respectability, M. Galland dwelt in a smug street within decorous propinquity of the fashionable Place Royale. His line of business

was as humdrum and respectable as himself, and the door-keeper, who kept the stone staircase so scrupulously spotless, was unaccustomed to agitated clients. The beautiful lady who emerged from a hackney sedan, and tremulously paid the men more than a double fare, was extremely agitated, and appeared in a desperate hurry to reach the first-floor landing. Evidently an aristo. Doubtless she had a husband or a brother who had fallen within the meshes of the reigning spiders. Poor dear soul! Such episodes as unexpected arrest were but too common nowadays. Bless me! Her case must be a very urgent one, the concierge muttered, as he scratched his head in sympathy, for after an interval of fifteen minutes, the lady emerged in the company of M. Galland himself, looking graver than was his

wont, who, calling a coach, directed the driver to the nearest magistrate's.

“I understand my instructions, madame,” the solicitor said, as the pair were driven along. “But, if without breach of respect, I may be permitted to say so, you must be suffering from hallucination. Your will being safely deposited with me, it is manifest that its terms are your safeguard, even if any of them should wish to harm you. We will admit that M. le Marquis got into bad hands, and that your hours were made unpleasant by another of your charming sex. But from that point to personal violence is a great stride, and you must pardon me if I fail to see any justifiable cause for apprehension. It is a morbid fancy, believe me. However, your wishes shall be gratified, and you will be able to retire to the chateau of Lorge

with mind relieved. This is the house. I follow you to the first floor. You will make the declaration I suggested, before my friend, M. Sardeigne, who is a magistrate, and proper witnesses."

It was certainly a strange proceeding and the worthy magistrate was justified in his surprise. Here was a celebrated Court beauty of whose fame he had often heard, who pretended to believe that her relatives were hankering after her money to the extent of a deep-laid plot, ending in personal injury. "If you say so, madame," he observed, with a gallant bow, "I am bound to believe you. I should have thought it more likely that someone would take to kidnapping, for the sake of being proud possessor of the fairest woman in France."

Gabrielle sighed. Was not a would-

be kidnapper at the bottom of all her fears ?

M. Galland produced the last will and testament of Gabrielle, Marquise de Gange, on which the ink was but just dry, and his friend, having summoned his secretary and two male attendants, the lady signed it in their presence.

Then, instructed by M. Galland, she made a solemn declaration that if her life should be cut off before that of the maréchale, her mother, and that if she should have been found in the interim to have executed another will of more recent date, she thereby formally disavowed the latter instrument. If she were destined to outlive the maréchale, which she did not think likely, M. Galland, on the demise of Madame de Brèze would visit Lorge, and another arrangement would be made.

She had a presentiment, she explained, which pointed to a life cut off by violent means before its prime, and expressed in the most distinct and emphatic manner words could express, her desire that the testament just executed should alone be regarded as authentic.

“Dear me! A presentiment?” laughed M. Sardeigne, “as well consult with lawyers about ghosts! To set your mind at rest in this peculiar matter,” proceeded the magistrate, perceiving that his mirth was ill-timed, “let it be understood that a cross after the signature on any subsequent testament will be considered to convey that it was signed under coercion.”

The business accomplished, Gabrielle breathed more freely, and the abbé, observing at dinner how serene she looked, grew suspicious. Such calm after their

recent stormy interview, seemed to suggest that she had been doing something underhand, on which she plumed herself. What could it be? Something that boded him no good. In the imminent war, which was to be declared so soon as the party were back in Touraine, it would clearly be perilous and rash to take the field alone.*

* It must be remembered that the French law, as it at present stands, dates from the later epoch of Napoleon. The events connected with the will of the Marquise de Gange are historical. L. W.





CHAPTER XVIII.

A SURPRISE.

THE quartet that journeyed back to solitude was not a lively one, for each of the four occupants of the travelling berline was fully engrossed by private speculations. The chevalier was nervous and uneasy, having received severe mental castigations at the hands of brother Pharamond. The marquis avoided his wife's eye, and glanced wistfully now and again at his Mentor, as though to crave support in some matter of which his conscience was afraid. The abbé smiled and nodded

(245)

encouragement at intervals, and then grew grave again, for he knew that he was on the point of playing a trump card, and players miscalculate sometimes as to what remains in the adversary's hand. Gabrielle, gazing calmly from the windows, seemed scarcely aware of flitting trees and passing villages, or the constantly recurring jerky stoppages for the change of steaming horses. She did not remark the altered attitude of the rustics, who scowled at the emblazoned carriage panels, with hat on head, pipe in mouth, and arms crossed tightly over chest. A party of fugitive aristos, fleeing from the sinking ship like other rodents. Well, let them go. France was well rid of such vermin that were not worth the rope and lantern. As they approached their destination, some recognized the coronet and coat, and

made furtive awkward bows. The Gange family were not so bad as others, report said, and as for the lady, sure no wickedness could lurk in her mild angel's face.

She was about to see her darlings, and her spirits rose, for the sojourn in the capital had been a long one. Of course they were safe in Toinon's care, but the mother had been weaving ingenious plans for their advantage, which she longed to execute forthwith. And then she fell a wondering as to how, under fresh auspices, they would all get on at Lorge. So far as the fortune was concerned there was naught to dread. Were her secret fears due, indeed, as had been suggested, to morbid fancy? No. Life would be far from easy; but a sturdy heart armoured in love's panoply can surmount difficulties. She knew too well

now that, at best, the brothers looked on her existence as a necessary evil. She could see it in the lack-lustre eyes even of the chevalier, who, doubtless, had been well tutored and taught to believe false tales. The poor drivelling chevalier! What his hazy views might be on any subject was of little consequence. As friend or foe he was equally harmless. It was well to have been undeceived as to the abbé, and to know him for what he was — plausible, cunning, double-faced, vindictive. Why should she, Gabrielle, fear him? Forewarned, forearmed. If she placed no trust in her smooth brother-in-law—held studiously aloof from him—he could not betray or do her injury. Yet was this so? What of the horoscope and her own presentiment? To remain unmolested was overmuch to hope for. And

then the marquise found herself marvelling what form his too certain malevolence would take. He would, of course, misconstrue all her acts and read them awry to Clovis. Alas! as things were, even that no longer mattered. For the future, so long as they lived, husband and wife would each go their ways, tacitly agreeing not to annoy each other, and in the ancient chateau there was so much room that the pair need never meet. A sad condition of affairs to have arrived at, and yet—is it not best to save painful fretting of soul and futile nerve friction by boldly confronting and accepting the inevitable in all its ugliness?

When we have given up crying for the moon, we can coldly contemplate the once-desired prize, critically examine each blemish, and shall probably be surprised

at ourselves for having yearned after so spotty an object. The Marquis de Gange, deprived of glamour robes, was but a commonplace mortal, after all. Not good; not particularly bad. Unpractical, lazy, given to useless theorizing. Sure, in a previous life, he must have been a comely ox, fond of swishing its tail in the sunshine and blinkingly chewing the cud, with its legs to the knees in a puddle. Reflexion brought conviction that the diabolical woman who, happily, was gone for ever, had, out of sheer spitefulness, smirched her own fair fame without a cause. She had avowed herself the marquis's mistress merely to irritate his wife, just as she had threatened to warp the children's minds to frighten the mother into rashness. Poor distracted wife and mother. What could have possessed her

— Gabrielle marvelled — to have gone through that performance in the water? Could she really and seriously have been so acutely affected by the idea that Mademoiselle Brunelle had succeeded in occupying the place within her husband's heart for which she had herself unsuccessfully longed? What a foolish and unnecessary fraying of heart strings! Was she so blinded as to have been unable to realize that the thing he called his heart was so full of selfishness that there lacked room for any other feeling? No. Even though she loved him then, it was not wholly on his account that she had suffered. It was the loss of her children, apparently complete and irrevocable, that had goaded her to mad despair. Well, well, Heaven had been merciful. The woman had been driven forth—her baleful shadow would

cross her path no more. The darlings were her own again. The future was not so black after all. She would, on arrival at the chateau, place things on an entirely new footing ; would take up her quarters in the wing erst occupied by the objectionable Aglaé, and, by aid from without, continue the education of Victor and Camille, which, during the last year, had been sorely neglected. As for the rest of the chateau, the three brothers might have it to themselves, and what they did and how their time was spent, so long as they did not tease her, should be no concern of hers.

Thus, I daresay, has the ingenuous lamb, clothed in the white wool of its simplicity, thought to cope, with success, against the hovering wolf and snarling panther. There is room enough for all

of us, it has bleated. Let me gambol on this square of sward, and do you frolic as you choose beyond. The artless thing cannot discern the smacking chops of wolf or hungry leer of panther, or perceive that it is its own quivering pink limbs that the two are after, and which they are preparing presently to rend. If Gabrielle could have read the thoughts that were working in two busy skulls within that rumbling berline she might have, perhaps, gazed out of the window with less hopeful equanimity.

Clovis, touched on his rawest points, was burning with exasperation. As Pharamond had truly declared it was absolutely monstrous of the old donkey who was dead to have placed a noble of ancient race and lofty lineage in so ridiculous a predicament; and it was just one shade

more shocking that his never-sufficiently-to-be-execrated daughter should have so meanly taken advantage of the situation. She had actually dared, with an innocent simper which set all his nerves twanging, to tell him one morning to his face that he was to live on an allowance! He, her lord and master! Whether the allowance was to be large or small was beside the question. He was firmly resolved, and supported therein by Pharamond, utterly to repudiate the allowance. She had humiliated him once, and was bent on doing so again and again—was unwise enough, having planted a dagger, to turn it in the wound, thereby rousing the victim out of sheer pain to make a desperate effort of retaliation. By the terms of a will which she had been sufficiently insolent to make, her fortune

was to pass over his head for the behoof of his own children, who would be thus emancipated from any control on his part. If she could act so outrageously and show so clearly how little she respected his feelings, she could not expect him to consider hers. And with it all there was a sham veneer of deference that was but added insult. "Clovis," she had said, when composedly making the announcement, "I have thought it all over carefully, and am acting for the best according to my lights. I should like you to feel assured that the revenues I hand to you for your own use are, indeed, your own; I mean that however ill you may behave to me I will never withdraw them, for I do not wish you to feel, on your good behaviour, at the mercy of your wife."

There was a lofty air of magnanimity

about this that was sheer impertinence. It was as though she were to say:—"I know you to be a worm while I am an æglet, and the lower you may elect to grovel, I shall myself, by contrast, appear to soar the higher." Was it a crafty way of putting him on his honour? Was he to understand that, of course, he must respect the wishes in all things of so magnanimous a benefactress? It was treating him like a schoolboy, and, whatever he should elect to do to show his independence would be justifiable, however unpalatable it might prove to the self-elected schoolmistress.

Thus, by the most crystalline of demonstrations was it proved to conscience that reproaches were out of place, and that that importunate monitor would do well to go to bed. But for all that

Clovis felt secretly ashamed of himself as well as a little frightened about something he had done, and impelled to look to the abbé for support.

The abbé, happily for himself, had long since smothered his own monitor under the pillows, and had replaced the corpse by a rival, called Expediency. He had made a suggestion to the marquis a few days since, and the latter, shocked and alarmed at first, had permitted himself without much trouble to be argued into its acceptance. So far so good. The suggestion had been quietly carried out, and it remained to be proved how the marquise would take it.

It was in the afterglow of a lovely evening in late summer, that the party arrived within sight of the well-known turrets. There were no servants about.

Toinon stood smileless at the gate alone, gazing into vacancy, and seemed to survey her mistress as she descended from the carriage with a serious air of doubtful concern.

“Here we are at last!” said the marquise, with an assumption of gaiety. “Why, how odd you look. This is not a cordial welcome!”

“Madame is welcome,” returned Toinon, curtly.

“The children—they are well?”

“Monsieur Victor and Mademoiselle Camille are well,” was the brief rejoinder.

“Of course, the little dears are well,” cried the abbé, cheerfully, “or we should have heard of it. Poor Mademoiselle Toinon has lost her tongue, being reduced to stone by ennui. How goes my old enemy, Maître Jean Boulot?”

“ He is at Blois, busy.”

“ So much the better, for I don’t mind confessing now that I was a wee bit afraid of his rough ways and stalwart bulk. His room is better than his company—a Jacobin ! ”

“ No one who is good need be afraid of Jean,” retorted Toinon, who, without another word, led the way across the courtyard.

The chill of presentiment touched Gabrielle like an icy wind as she passed in to the dreary hall, black now in shadowy twilight. The crumbling implements of torture on the walls took fantastic and forbidding shapes. The panoplies of helmets of the Moyen Age seemed to mope, and mow, and wink their eyeless sockets. Somehow, Lorge seemed more grimly forbidding than before, after the

long absence ; there was a pervading odour of dank decay which was as a breath from out the charnel-house. The chatelaine shuddered, and drawing her cloak closer took her foster-sister by the hand.

“What is it ? Toinon, tell me,” she whispered. “Has something dreadful happened ?”

Toinon glanced round quickly with the same strange expression of doubt mingled with concern, and held her peace.

What could it be ? Toinon appeared to consider that her mistress had done something wrong—or was it some act, whose unwisdom she would surely rue, which filled the eyes of the foster-sister with disapproval. In the look there was pained surprise as well as pity. The tightened lips were closed, imprisoning reproach.

Foreboding, she knew not what, the marquise mounted the grand staircase and opened the door of the long saloon, expecting to find the children there.

“ Not here ? Where are they ? ” began Gabrielle. Then her voice died away, the words frozen on her lips. The brothers had remained below, ostensibly to superintend the removal of the baggage from the coach. In the dim saloon with its view through the gaunt row of windows of the crocus-coloured Loire, stood Gabrielle aghast, and Toinon, with brows knit anxiously — and against the light at the further end a tall, upright figure like a sable shadow, that was only too familiar.

“ She ! ” murmured the startled châtelaine, clasping her hands upon her breast. “ Mademoiselle Aglaé Brunelle ! ”

“ It was a trick, then,” Toinon muttered, with a deepening frown. “ She knew not of her coming ! ”

The commanding figure swept swiftly past the tapestries of Odette and the mad old king, and with a glad cry Aglaé seized Gabrielle’s cold hands and covered them with kisses.

“ The good marquise ! ” she cooed. “ The dear excellent marquise ! I am so glad, so glad, to have been summoned ! There was a little unpleasantness, was there not ? A deplorable misunderstanding, and our dearest lady like the angel that she is, has forgiven and forgotten, and we are better friends than ever.”

“ I never summoned you,” began the marquise, faintly, but her voice was quickly drowned in the torrent of the other’s volubility.

“I know — I know,” she purred, with kittenish gestures of overweening joy. “It was but a tiny ripple on our ideal life! Madame was sorry to have so misread her Aglaé’s devotion, and bade the dear abbé to invite her hither on a visit. Did I delay an instant? Surely not, for I burned to show the good marquise how cruelly she’d wronged me. Oh! What ineffable delight! Is it not well to be divided by a tiff to taste the glad moment of reunion?”

Gabrielle remaining silent, too giddy and too sick to collect her thoughts, the other went on glibly—

“I arrived yesterday, a whole day before you, and have been so good—have I not, Mademoiselle Toinon? You like not poor Aglaé, and frown at her, but must speak honest truth. Knowing to

my dismay and grief when I went hence that madame could deign to be jealous of one so insignificant, I refrained from embracing my pets until madame should grant permission. And since I adore them as if they were my own, madame can guess what that has cost me. Yes! I can hardly believe it possible myself, but I've not yet seen either Victor or Camille, the sweet ones!"

With a sigh of admiration and a large gesture of the dusky arms, suggestive of amazement at such self-control, Aglaë ceased, shaking her head archly, and holding the unwilling chatelaine by both hands, gazed long and fondly at her.

It was evident that the woman was playing a part, and was over-acting it. Was this done purposely, that the marquise, who was not clever, might have

no doubt about the acting? It seemed so to watchful Toinon. The creature had succeeded somehow in inflicting her baleful presence for a second time upon the *ménage*, and wished it to be understood that the returned Mademoiselle Brunelle was another person, no relation to the one who had been ejected. Why had she come? What did she propose to do? She surely did not expect the hapless marquise to clasp in her arms one who had so injured her—respond in earnest to her blandishments?

The brothers had come up the stairs to reconnoitre, and stood somewhat shyly in the doorway. Was there to be an explosion—a harrowing scene in which passion was to be torn to tatters; or was the artful play of the abbé to win the trick? He took in the situation with an

exulting heart-thump. He had judged rightly. Of course he had! The marquise, pale as marble, was struck dumb—discomfited. She neither stormed nor wept. With a movement almost as kittenish as Aglaé's, he joined the group.

“Reconciled? I knew it,” he cried, rubbing his white hands with relief. “Clovis, come and witness this delightful spectacle. The past is past and buried. We shall now begin afresh, and, profiting by experience, will be so happy, that madame will forgive our little *ruse*. The fact is, my sweet Gabrielle, that Clovis intends to devote himself to a yet deeper course of study, which requires a secretary and a partner—one who has an inkling of the secrets which are to be unearthed for the world's benefit. I took on myself, therefore, to risk the vials of a transient annoyance for

the ultimate good of all. Mademoiselle will now be so occupied with her new duties that, to her regret, she must renounce all intercourse with the little ones. This, I believe, will meet your wishes? You are not angry? That is well. We are both pardoned, are we not?"

The marquise cast one slow glance of dumb remonstrance at Clovis, who was shifting from one foot to the other, guiltily, and shaking herself free from the exuberant Aglaé, left the room with Toinon.

Her strange reception by the latter was fully explained. Her foster-sister had believed that she was sufficiently unstable of purpose herself to have summoned the evil spirit that had been exorcised; it had not entered the girl's head that the men could have dared

secretly to play such a trick upon her patience. What was their motive for the proceeding? Did the woman wield an occult power over the marquis such as forced him to obey her will even from a distance? Did she hold him in such abject thraldom that he really could not get on without her? The abbé had been the acting party in the arrangement. Had he re-introduced the bugbear merely to distress his sister-in-law, and display his malignant spleen? Such speculations as these passed vaguely through Gabrielle's dizzy brain as she stared aimlessly from her bedroom window into the courtyard, mechanically counting the big familiar stones which composed the opposite wall, surveying the iron-bound postern door with its complicated locks and bolts.

Toinon watched her mistress with

growing ire as she bustled hither and thither arranging the details of the toilet.

Though scarce conceivable it was true —she could perceive it in every mournful line on the gloomy face of the marquise—that these bad men had deliberately done behind her back that which they knew to be most abhorrent to the gentle chatelaine ; and she the one to whom they owed every earthly comfort ! By so mad a stroke they had overreached themselves, for, of course, madame would resent the intolerable insolence—order the woman off with contumely—send the men packing. Toinon was aware of the late maréchal's testamentary dispositions ; was thankful now to remember that it rested with her mistress alone to turn out the ex-governess as well as the chevalier and the abbé ; and

it somewhat nettled the faithful abigail that she should not at once have shown a proper spirit, and have abruptly closed the situation. The marquis looked just now so shamefaced that a few indignant words would have brought him to a sense of his wickedness. Whether there were or not guilty relations between the marquis and mademoiselle, was beside the point. The latter had by her fiendish behaviour well-nigh driven the marquise out of the world, and here she was playing the affectionate friend with exaggerated pantomime. It was disgusting. Madame being much too good, would perhaps give her shelter till the morrow, instead of expelling her into the night; but madame must rise in the morning with a firm resolve to make them all understand that she was mistress.

Thus grumbling, Toinon, who was an-

swered only by a sigh. A thrill of doom had passed over Gabrielle. She felt the feeling of helplessness in face of the inevitable which brings with it an abiding sense of calm. She was hedged round by enemies —what mattered one the more? That Clovis should be so unutterably base as he now showed himself to be filled her with a numb surprise, tinged with subdued regret. The world, from the point where she now stood, was of such exceeding hideousness, that it came home with conviction to the spectator that nothing mattered any more. Oh! to be out of it! To be protected by a shield of sod from the tawdry mockeries that make this dwelling-place untenable! Should she, acting on Toinon's counsel, gird up her loins on the morrow, and assert her rights? *À quoi bon?* Gabrielle felt so shocked, so sore, so weary, and so

desolate, that to show energy was not worth while. They had had the tact to let her comprehend at once that there was to be no more interference between herself and the dear ones. That was a prudent move on their part. Were these not now her all? If she and they were permitted to live their quiet life in the secluded wing, what signified the rest? Victor and Camille were out of reach of the greed and malice of the foe, quite secure from harm, for were their mother to be snatched away, they would be removed at once by the maréchale, and watched over by the friendly solicitor.

Toinon surveyed her mistress with amazed disgust when the latter quietly remarked, as she unrobed to go to rest, that for the present she would watch and wait; and act, if need were, by and by.



CHAPTER XIX.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

COULD we remove the fronts from the imposing domiciles whose dignified exteriors compel our admiring awe, we should often rub our eyes in astonishment at the curious spectacle within. Than the outgoings and incomings of the inhabitants of Lorge nothing could appear more decorous and respectable, and yet as regarded a prospect of lasting peace, that group was composed of the least promising elements.

On the day after the return from Paris Gabrielle remained in seclusion, making

no sign, while the others waited with more or less impatience to see if she would throw down the gauntlet. Aglaé could scarce conceal her satisfaction at the warmth of her dear friend's greeting. Clovis was genuinely delighted to see her and made no secret of his joy, whereat the abbé was annoyed, though he knew better than to betray the feeling. Time had not loosed the bonds wherein the marquis was held by his affinity. On the contrary, absence had in his case made the heart grow fonder, for he seemed now to have quite forgotten the fear with which former admiration had been mingled. It was rather hard, the abbé could not help considering, that his own influence, for which he had laboured with such patience and dexterity, should pale so easily before that of this lady, who for twelve months

had made no move. By summoning her to his aid, had he raised up a spirit which by and by he would be powerless to lay? No. For the attainment of an object that was now clearly modelled before his sight, the assistance of Mademoiselle Brunelle was absolutely necessary. The object attained, he would steal a march on her, and on his brothers as well, if need were. Meanwhile, it was of the best augury that the chatelaine should remain quiescent. It has been said that the woman who hesitates is lost. Certain it is that one of the nature of the marquise—of the class who seem specially made to endure slings and arrows—does not gain strength by delay. She can in a moment of impulse perform an act of energy ; but if she waits and broods her strength exhales itself in moans.

The marquis and his friend got out

their books, made a grand parade of being vastly busy—even dug out the blessed 'cello and groaned out an affecting fugue; but expecting you know not what it is impossible to keep the mind from wandering, and Aglaé, try as she would to command herself, jumped up at intervals and strode the polished floor with statuesque arms crossed over the ample bosom, longing for something to occur.

“No news is good news, believe me,” the abbé whispered in caution, as hour succeeded hour, and their patience began to ooze. “If she accepts her position without a struggle, a most important point is gained.”

Aglaé sniffed fretfully, and passed her square-tipped fingers through the masses of her blue-black hair. “That is mighty well,” she said, tartly; “but for the creature

to take me back again so quietly, after all that passed, makes me long to pinch, and beat, and slap anything so deplorably spiritless. If she does not do something to-morrow, you will have to lock me up, for I shall not be able to prevent myself from rushing into her room and banging her head against the wall."

"No more blunders!" returned the abbé, sternly. "You have not the skill to read her. Do not forget that it was by your wrong-headedness and bungling that you brought about your own defeat. Remember the terms of the agreement which was to bring you back among us. You were to be guided by me absolutely, and abstain from silly little private plots which could only prove disastrous to us both."

Mademoiselle was silent, and her

heavy mobile brows shaped themselves into something like a scowl. She bit her thick red lips and smiled an engaging smile, as she patted the abbé with a fan, playfully. "Of course, I will do as you bid," she said, "but you must not look so cross. I am all gratitude for your many kindnesses and too glad of so skilled a guide." Then as she turned away there were lines about her mouth that were not pretty to look upon, and a sullen shade upon her brow, that was gone again like a summer thunder-cloud.

The classically-modelled bosom of mademoiselle covered a black well of bitterness. She loathed herself for having bungled ; she hated Gabrielle with an all-absorbing hate as the author of her discomfiture ; she detested the abbé for his domineering ways—and Clovis for not

having defended her. She hated all and everyone in that she had accidentally been kept in the dark as to the real owner of the fortune, whereby she had been betrayed into a pitfall.

As she was being ignominiously conducted to Blois, like a thief taken in the act, a boiling geyser of venom had scalded her cheeks ; and as she writhed behind a lace handkerchief she registered a vow to be avenged on Gabrielle some day a hundred-fold for that which she had borne at her hands. The knowledge did not tend to appease her wrath that without outside help she would be incapable of fulfilling the vow. The devil will do much to assist his own, but his methods are not artistically complete, and at a critical moment he whisks into space with a grin, leaving his votaries to disaster.

Hence it is not always well to depend too much upon the devil. It is a fact worthy of remark that in the legends of his many compacts with mankind it is always assumed that he is honest in his dealings and a model of business-like straightforwardness, while it is the insignificant mortal—mere wax in such hands—who ultimately cheats and circumvents him. Surely this is all wrong. We would not wish the devil to be inconsistent, and it is in the fitness of things that his ardent worshippers should find the ground slippery under foot, and the power in which they trusted—nowhere.

Vainly she revolved the chances of ever returning to Lorge, when suddenly arrived the abbé's first letter, which was quite sticky and mawkish with honey. What was he driving at? He would not

write thus without an object. She smiled, locked away the missive, and waited.

Then came the second letter, wherein, to her surprise, she found the gates open again which she feared were hermetically closed. Go back to Lorge? Of course she would, with alacrity, and follow the abbé's instructions, though she understood them not. She knew that the old nuisance was defunct, that the marquise was in full possession. What was this miracle which called her back to Paradise? It mattered not. Her massive foot once more within the threshold, she would profit by the experience of the past, and in the end come out the gainer.

Now you will perceive how odd a mixture was the ex-governess; a woman who hung for awhile in the balance, till the devil inserted a toe and, by its weight,

settled the matter. She had genuinely liked the marquis's children, and would, if circumstances so ordained, have gone down to posterity as a typically virtuous second wife, but for that devil's toe!

Well, the toe was inserted, and proved a heavy one, for down came the scale with a thud. Perceiving they were a fruitful cause of danger, she made up her mind without a qualm that she would avoid her quondam pets in the future, and school herself to gaze with sphinx-like stoniness on the twain whom she had kissed and cuddled.

What happened to them—one way or the other—was become a matter of complete indifference. The black well seethed and boiled. She would have revenge, somehow, and at the same time feather her nest.

Suspense lasted till the end of the second day. As the party—minus the chatelaine—were sitting down to dinner, there appeared upon the scene, Toinon, who demurely laid a note upon the marquis's plate, and without a word retired.

As many weak people do, Clovis stared at the letter, longing to open it, and yet loth to do so, knowing that its contents could scarcely be agreeable, and it was not until the snorting and sniffing of the affinity awoke him to a sense of responsibility, that he took it up and broke the seal. The letter was exceedingly unpleasant and to the purpose.

“ Clovis, when I called upon my father to rid me of that woman, I accomplished a sacred duty which cost me dear ; for to inflict pain upon another brings the like

upon myself. That you should have forced her on me again, was due, I am sure, to fear. I suspected before that you were afraid of her, for what reason I could not guess. The gulf between us is impassable, and as you brood over this fact and know that you have dug it yourself, you will be filled some day with unavailable remorse. The future appals me — I shudder at its contemplation, wondering to what you may be goaded. The conduct of an unscrupulous woman, who has all to gain, I can understand, but yours remains a mystery. What a life ! What a future ! If at your age you can be so easily fooled by a vulgar *intriguante*, what will become of you when old ? How singular a creation is man ! You have oppressed, humiliated, abandoned me who loved you for yourself with an ardour

that amazes me when I recall it now, and are content to grovel at the feet of one who but likes you for what you can bestow —whom you will know some day and despise.

“When your conscience forces you to see what you have done, seek not to wreak vengeance upon me. Henceforth, we dwell apart, and your life and mine have naught in common. You may go your ways on this condition unmolested. Never speak to me, or to the children: never let any member of your coterie invade the apartments I inhabit. The house is large enough. Avoid a scandal. Farewell. To each other we are henceforth dead.

“GABRIELLE MARQUISE DE GANGE.”

With twitching fingers the marquis passed the letter to the abbé who read and

passed it on to mademoiselle. It was not the sort of letter that it would be nice to read aloud. Silence fell upon the group, and by tacit consent all rose and went about their avocations, without venturing to comment on the document.

The letter breathed dignity, and there was something fine about the scathing words contemptuously flung at the foe. A vulgar *intriguante*, indeed! Well, why deny that it was true, though the statement was somewhat blunt? Mademoiselle always preferred to consider herself the architect of her own fortunes.

On the morrow, the abbé, who, more disconcerted than he chose to admit, by the decided action of the chatelaine, had sallied forth to meditate in private, perceived that she had already taken steps to isolate herself!

He found workmen busy in opening a doorway which should give access to the children's wing from the bedroom of the marquise, and a locksmith changing the lock of the postern which gave upon the garden moat.

So that pleasance was to be denied henceforth to the group which composed the enemy? How would Clovis take this move? A scandal, forsooth! Was she not causing one herself by so ostentatiously raising barriers and employing workmen who would chatter? It was evidently her intention to occupy the long saloon, the boudoir adjoining, the bedroom that looked on the yard, and the children's wing, with the moat garden for outdoor recreation, leaving the rest of the premises to the family. If they were never to see or speak with her, how could they prose-

cute their plans ? The masters who doubtless would be summoned from Blois to teach the young idea would certainly detect something unusual, and they too would be sure to gossip. And what of the servants ? They were trustworthy enough, since they had for the most part been engaged by the abbé himself, as representing the Marquis de Gange, and Gabrielle had never thought of interfering. But the best of servants have tongues, and when the neighbours should flit over from Montbazon (which they were certain to do shortly) coachman would confide in coachman, and lacquey in lacquey, and old Madame de Vaux would hear all about it and spread the news like wildfire. All Touraine would believe that the Marquise de Gange was a prisoner in her own chateau ; the mob who were fond of her

would rise, and there would be a pretty bother! What a pity she was not indeed a prisoner, hedged round with subtle precautions such as the abbé could so readily invent!

When he revolved this point, he sighed. No. That plan was not feasible for many reasons, at least for the present. This was not the moment for coercion but for wheedling. Yet, he reflected, it might be as well, as chance arose, to complete the ring of servants. How very provoking it was that things should run so agley! Mademoiselle, instead of proving useful, seemed only likely to give rise to complications. Her reappearance had already produced a disastrous effect, for what was the use of setting her to manage the marquis's conscience if his wife could retire out of reach? As matters stood, to drag

her thence by violence would never do, for shilly-shally Clovis would turn restive. If only he could be induced to go away for a time with his troublesome conscience to pay a visit to the prophet at Spa—but there again arose a difficulty. His presence was necessary here, for if that will was to be cancelled and another made, it was he who ostensibly must manage it.

A council of war! determined Pharamond at last. Valuable time is being wasted. We must combine and resolve upon a plan of campaign which must be carried without flinching to the end.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he turned briskly round and went with rapid steps in search of his allies.

Presently, mademoiselle, the chevalier, and the abbé found themselves sitting round a table in the small sanctum the

latter had made his own—a cosy little chamber, panelled in dark oak with heavy double-doors—and the host took up his parable and spake,

“ Mademoiselle Brunelle is probably aware,” he began, in his low sweet voice, “ that she was not summoned here for her charming society alone. We have long known each other’s views and wishes, and have arrived at a consciousness that without mutual assistance our desires are unattainable. Fortunately they do not clash; on the contrary, although different, they run amicably side by side. So fortunate! It will be best, will it not, if I review them?

“ Mademoiselle Brunelle has developed a fancy to wear a coronet. The said coronet would prove a paltry bauble unless handsomely gilt and jewelled. The

gold and jewels are unluckily in possession of a lady who at present holds the coronet, and who has no intention of resigning either the one or the other. She must be made to give up both—how?"

There was a pause, during which the chevalier blinked uneasily. The abbé had succeeded in drawing one brother at least well under his thumb. Like a hound, poor sodden Phebus gazed constantly into the eyes of Pharamond, seeking his orders there. There was a germ of an idea within the breast of each, which none cared to drag into the light.

"Abbé," remarked mademoiselle, curtly. "As usual, you beat about the bush. There is none to overhear. What you would suggest, state plainly."

"Am I not plain enough?" laughed Pharamond, lightly.

“No,” returned Aglaé, drawing down her brows in thought. “You say that our views run parallel. How can that be? You love that mawkish creature, and, for my part, as I have said before, you may wear her and welcome, though I don’t admire your taste. I tried to assist you in the past, but—well—my efforts were not successful. How can I help you now, without injury to my own prospects? You are not so foolish as to suppose that I would accept Clovis without a sou, nor am I so silly as to imagine that you would take that chit without her fortune.”

“Mademoiselle sketches a situation with such brief lucidity, that it is a privilege to listen to her,” replied Pharamond, with a tight twitch of his thin lips, that was intended for a smile. “But as there are blotches on the sun, so is not

even she quite perfect. She forgets that the world is ever rolling, and that as we roll with it our views change and give place to others. She will remember, perhaps, that but for me she would still be an angel without the gate, and grant that I am not likely to employ the paw of one so clever, without sharing the chestnuts which she rescues."

"A compromise, then?" said Aglaé.
"I am still completely in the dark."

"Because you start on a false premise, which was once true, but is so no longer. With an engaging frankness, which claims my devoted admiration, you admit that you do not care a straw for Clovis without his coronet and a sufficiency of wealth. Well, I care not a jot more for Gabrielle. She was misguided enough to flout my suit, to cover me with lofty scorn, to tread

me under foot. Am I a man, think you, to forgive that? Not likely.

“If I could have my way, I would take her with me for a while, and then fling her, soiled and broken, to the lowest of my lackeys! It would be a sweet and complete vengeance, which, alas, prudence bids me to forego.” The abbé, as he considered the delightful possibilities of such a vengeance, looked so wicked with his pallid face and grinding teeth, and green eyes lighted from within, that the chevalier cowered, and Aglaé was a little uncomfortable.

Here was a revelation, and a clue to his labyrinthine mind. He had come to dislike the unlucky marquise as much as she did, and the two were to unite for her undoing. That was capital!

Gradually the green light paled, the

white face flushed, and Pharamond laughing lightly was himself again.

“ How wise we are,” he said, “ to make full confession and keep no secrets back! She has tied up her fortune, and must untie it, and then we must take possession and divide. You and Clovis will take a half, Phebus and I the other. There will be enough for all. Surely the arrangement is a simple one.”

Yes. Certain conditions arrived at, the rest was simple. That germ down in the darkness was developing rapidly, and putting forth dark slimy leaves like those of the deadly nightshade.

The three contemplated one another and kept silence, each thinking the same thought.

Having been induced to revoke her will, the marquise must be put away.

But ere the treasure could be reached there were ramparts to be scaled, wide ditches to be crossed. Could the obstacles ever be surmounted? Some of them towered as high as virgin Alps.

The abbé proceeded to explain that the rôle of mademoiselle was to skilfully bring the marquis to a fitting state of mind. She was to find engrossing occupation for such intellect as he possessed, dazzle his eyes with mystical gewgaws, increase by artful pricks his exasperation against his wife, swaddle him with flattering attentions, keep the wound green, yet wrap him in cotton wool.

Mademoiselle shook her head dubiously. Did she not remember the look he gave her when she wished the wife to drown? He would never consent to

such strong measures, as might seem convenient to less qualmish persons.

“Pooh!” retorted Pharamond. “Do I not know him? When a thing is irrevocably done, he will be glad to benefit by the results. You must keep him in play like a struggling fish, and when the time comes bring him to land. With half a great fortune, and the removal of its importunate owner, he would soon grow content.”

“Half the fortune,” mused Aglaé, deep down within herself. “H’m! H’m! Half the fortune! Why not the whole? Half-measures are not satisfactory!”

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